ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Career gatekeeping in cultural fields

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Abstract
This paper presents a comparative analysis of career gatekeeping processes in two cultural fields. Drawing on data on appointment procedures in German academia and booking processes in North American stand-up comedy, we compare how gatekeepers in two widely different contexts evaluate and select candidates for established positions in their respective field and validate their decisions. Focusing on three types of gatekeeping practices that have been documented in prior research—typecasting, comparison, and legitimization—our analysis reveals major differences in how gatekeepers perform these practices across our two cases: (1) *typecasting* based on ascriptive categories versus professional criteria, (2) *comparisons* that are ad-hoc and holistic versus systematic and guided by performance criteria, and (3) *legitimation* by means of ritualization versus transparency. We argue that these differences are related to the social and organizational context in which gatekeepers make selection decisions, including differences in the structure of academic and creative careers and the organization of the respective labor markets in which these careers unfold. These findings contribute to scholarship on gatekeeping in cultural fields by providing comparative insights into the work of career gatekeepers and the social organization of career gatekeeping processes.

Keywords Gatekeeping · Academia · Comedy · Typecasting · Comparison · Legitimation

Cultural fields are competitive arenas for producers of cultural goods. What is at stake is not only the creation of valuable products, but also access to positions which bestow cultural producers with material security and symbolic recognition

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29 (Bourdieu 1993). A key role in regulating access to such established positions is
30 played by gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are actors who control access to desirable goods
31 and positions in a field, and who thereby have an important impact on careers in
32 cultural fields.

33 Because of the powerful positions they occupy, gatekeepers have received
34 a good amount of attention in scholarship on cultural fields. The bulk of this
35 research has concentrated on the social influences that shape gatekeepers' deci-
36 sions (see Godart and Mears 2009; Foster et al. 2011), as well as the conse-
37 quences of their decisions for the fate of cultural producers and their products
38 (see Bielby and Bielby 1994; Zuckerman et al. 2003). Some scholars have also
39 examined the evaluative practices and decision-making processes through which
40 gatekeeping decisions are produced (see Posselt 2016; Nylander 2014).

41 Irrespective of the analytic focus of prior scholarship, however, gatekeeping
42 has mostly been studied within the context of a given cultural field, for exam-
43 ple, literature or music (see Franssen and Kuipers 2013; Vermurlen 2016). In this
44 paper, we compare gatekeeping processes across fields to enhance our scholarly
45 understanding of variation in both the social organization of gatekeeping pro-
46 cesses and the gatekeeping practices that are mobilized by career gatekeepers in
47 different fields. To this end, we conduct a comparative analysis of gatekeeping
48 processes in two fields of cultural production: academia and stand-up comedy.

49 By adopting a comparative perspective, we build on a series of recent efforts
50 to leverage the heuristic power of cross-field comparisons for theory building (for
51 example, see Chong et al. 2019; Darr and Mears 2017; Leschziner and Green
52 2013). In addition, we respond to a recent call for more comparative research on
53 valuation and evaluation as a social process (Lamont 2012) by conceptualizing
54 gatekeeping as a case for the sociology of valuation and evaluation (SVE). Build-
55 ing on the SVE literature, we adopt a process-centric perspective and focus on
56 three gatekeeping practices—typecasting, comparison, legitimation—by which
57 gatekeepers in these two fields evaluate and select candidates for established
58 positions and validate their decisions (see Lamont 2012; Zuckerman 2012). Our
59 comparison reveals the different ways in which gatekeepers perform these seem-
60 ingly uniform practices. Typecasting in stand-up comedy revolves around ascrip-
61 tive categories and around professional criteria in academia. Comparisons tend to
62 be systematic and guided by performance criteria in academia but largely ad-hoc
63 and holistic in stand-up comedy. Lastly, gatekeeping processes are legitimized
64 through transparency in academia but ritualization in stand-up comedy.

65 We purposely compare career gatekeeping processes in two vastly different
66 cultural fields—a field of intellectual production and a field of popular entertain-
67 ment—to maximize the contrast between our two cases. This facilitates a bet-
68 ter understanding of the relationship of the social organization of gatekeeping
69 processes and the gatekeeping practices that career gatekeepers rely on. A better
70 understanding of this relationship is crucial, we argue, not only for scholarship
71 on gatekeeping, but also students of inequality because of the powerful role that
72 career gatekeepers play in shaping social mobility in cultural fields.

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Gatekeeping in cultural fields

Artistic directors of theaters or operas, literary agents, booking agents for comedy festivals, and members of academic hiring committees have one thing in common: They belong to a select group of individuals who control access to both established positions and symbolic authority in their fields.[1] Such positions are coveted because they bestow actors with recognition and guarantee a basic level of material security. Further, symbolic authority allows actors to influence the future valuation of cultural goods (Bourdieu 1993; Cattani et al. 2014). Thus, by controlling the mobility of cultural producers through either promotion and recognition or exclusion and rejection, literary agents, artistic directors, and comparable actors engage in "gatekeeping practices" (see Foster et al. 2011).

Gatekeeping practices belong to a broader category of mediating practices that regulate the legitimacy and distribution of resources as well as access to positions in cultural fields.[2] These mediating practices include evaluation, networking, disseminating, marketing, and selling practices, and are performed by cultural mediators or intermediaries (Bessy and Chauvin 2013; Janssen and Verboord 2015; Khaire 2017; Verdaasdonk 2001). The function of cultural mediators can include several of these practices (see the example of art galleries, cf. Bystryn 1978; Velthuis 2003).

Prior studies have shown that gatekeeping practices in cultural fields can be performed by various types of actors, including newspaper or literary editors in publishing (Clayman and Reisner 1998; Franssen and Kuipers 2013); peers in academia (Hirschauer 2010; Lamont 2009); agents in the movie and music industry (Roussel and Bielby 2015; Vermurlen 2016); and critics in the art, culinary, and literary worlds (Chong 2013; Greenfeld 1988; Lane 2013). Many of these gatekeepers have an influence on the careers of cultural producers by making decisions about cultural products, such as, for example, the role of peers in the anonymized evaluation of manuscripts for academic journals. But gatekeepers may also affect the career trajectories of cultural producers more directly by controlling access to established social positions. Although both types of gatekeepers may contribute to the production of inequality in cultural fields (Childress and Nault 2018), for the purpose of this paper we are primarily concerned with the second type of gatekeepers. Because the decisions of these gatekeepers have a direct impact on career trajectories in cultural fields, we refer to them as "career gatekeepers."

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[1] In using the distinction between established and unestablished positions, we build on prior sociological research on cultural fields that has described the transition from unestablished, outsider positions to established, insider positions as a crucial step in the careers of cultural producers (see Dowd and Pinheiro 2013; Dubois and François 2013). We acknowledge, however, that there is no universal, clear-cut definition of an "established" position. What constitutes an "established" position varies from field to field, and can be marked more or less formally (e.g., in some fields, there are formal titles for "established positions," such as "full professor" in academia, while in other fields these positions are identified in a less official manner). In the current analysis, we address the slipperiness of this term by using social actors' own intersubjective definitions of established and unestablished positions.

[2] Gatekeepers are not restricted to cultural fields; in fact, the concept was first developed to demonstrate the decision-making power of housewives in household food decisions (Lewin 1943). The first systematic applications occurred in research on mass media (cf. Shoemaker and Vos 2009).

A number of scholars have examined "career gatekeeping" in cultural fields. This literature has contributed to our knowledge on the factors that affect the decisions of career gatekeepers. For example, social networks influence the search and selection strategies used by booking agents for night clubs, academic peers involved in appointment procedures, and producers of fashion shows (Corra and Willer 2002; Foster et al. 2011; Godart and Mears 2009; van den Brink and Benschop 2014). In addition, career gatekeepers' positions in a field influence their decisions, as researchers have demonstrated for agencies in the film industry and comedy scouts at art festivals (Bielby and Bielby 1999; Friedman 2014).

The literature on career gatekeepers has also produced important insights on the effects of gatekeeping decisions. For example, studies have highlighted the effect of these decisions on tastes in the respective fields. Comedy scouts intensify taste boundaries when they select comedians for gigs, and jazz teachers reify the artistic rules of the field of jazz music (Friedman 2014; Nylander 2014). In addition, a few studies on career gatekeeping have concentrated on the effects of gatekeeping decisions on employment chances; this work includes analyses of employment throughout the project-based careers of writers and actors in the film and television industry (Bielby and Bielby 1999; Zuckerman et al. 2003).[3]

Lastly, scholarship on career gatekeepers has homed in on evaluative practices throughout the decision-making process. These studies shed light on how career gatekeepers apply specific norms and ideas in their decision-making (Posselt 2016; van den Brink and Benschop 2012), how their evaluative work oscillates between notions of artistic uniqueness and practical requirements of assessment procedures (Nylander 2014), and how career gatekeepers in different fields search for and source local knowledge (Darr and Mears 2017). In this paper, we aim to further contribute to this third line of research by shedding light on cross-field differences in how career gatekeepers make selection decisions and validate these decisions, and how these differences stand in relationship to differences in how career gatekeeping processes are organized in different types of cultural fields. In doing so, our paper takes up the assertion from cultural sociology that "[w]e need to know more about the thinking of gatekeepers" (Alexander and Smith 2003: 18).

Two cases of gatekeeping in cultural fields

To increase the comparative leverage of our study, we chose two widely different cases for our comparison, employing what Bechky and O'Mahony (2015) call a "comparative matched pair design between dissimilar cases." Even though academia and stand-up comedy both represent cultural fields, they are characterized by vastly different labor market and career structures. Similar to the labor market of other

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[3] It is worth noting that the foci of research on gatekeepers for cultural producers largely mirror the foci of research on gatekeepers for cultural products. Most strikingly, both literatures mostly draw on single case-studies, with few exceptions comparing cases within the same field (Greenfeld 1988; Lane 2013; Velthuis 2003; Verboord 2011).

143 cultural production industries, the labor market for stand-up comedians is an exter-
144 nal labor market (Zuckerman et al. 2003; Reilly 2017). Most stand-up comedians
145 are therefore freelancers who work for many different employers. Moreover, career
146 structures are marked by a low degree of standardization: there are no formalized
147 ranks that denote the career stage of a comedian. Positions in the comedy industry
148 are also fluid, depending on the demands of the market; even the most established
149 positions are short-term and project-based.

150 Academic careers, in contrast, follow a much more formalized structure (Mus-
151 selin 2010). There are clearly delineated ranks for different stages of a career in aca-
152 demia, as indicated by categories such as "doctoral candidate," "post-doc," and "full
153 professor." Throughout academia, there is a shared knowledge of the characteristics
154 and relative worth of each status category (cf. Angermuller 2017). In this system,
155 full professors occupy the most established position. Thus, compared to the short-
156 term contracts in the project-based labor market of stand-up comedy, the appoint-
157 ment of a full professor represents a substantial investment for a university. Rather
158 than being employed for a few months or years, full professors are tenured and often
159 stay at a university for several decades.

160 Crucially, German academia and North American stand-up comedy do not only
161 differ in their labor market and career structures. As we will show in the follow-
162 ing, there are also differences in the social organization of gatekeeping. While career
163 gatekeeping for German professor positions is organized as a formal procedure that
164 is embedded in an organizational context and guided by bureaucratic rules, gate-
165 keeping in the North American stand-up comedy is organized as a public audition
166 that is staged as a show. The case studies in the current analysis are: (1) appoint-
167 ments of professors in academia in Germany, in which members of committees,
168 external reviewers, and top university administrators decide between candidates, and
169 (2) stand-up comedy bookings in North America, in which comedians get hired for
170 shows and signed for development contracts with television networks, production
171 companies, and agents.

Gatekeeping in academia

173 To understand career gatekeeping in German academia, it is important to be aware
174 of some distinct features of the German academic labor market (see Musselin 2010).
175 While the job market for professors is federal, professors' salary is paid by one of
176 the 16 states [*Länder*] and state ministries are directly involved in appointments.[4]

4FL01 [4] Professors have traditionally been hired by the minister representing the local state [*Land*]. This
4FL02 approach was based on a main principle of German higher education policy dating back to the early 19th
4FL03 century: Although universities were free to choose their faculty and could submit a shortlist to the rector
4FL04 (the head of the university), appointments were overseen by the states [*Länder*] in order to prevent nepo-
4FL05 tism. For the same reason, the local states were also in charge of budgets and positions. Reforms enacted
4FL06 in 2001 sought to provide universities with more autonomy in their hiring policies, and since then most
4FL07 states have transferred their right to appoint professors to the universities (see the overviews in Musselin
4FL08 2010; Möhlmann 2014).

The main steps of professorial appointment procedures remained unchanged until today, and they follow a meticulous choreography: After the university administration approves a vacant position, an appointment committee is formed at the department level. Committees draft a public job advertisement and examine the applications, which include at least a cover letter, a curriculum vitae (CV), and a publication list. Based on the applications, committees identify a longlist of around ten candidates from usually several dozen applications. Candidates from the longlist are invited for job interviews and afterwards assessed by external reviews from peers that are solicited by the committee.[5] Reviews play an important role in the procedure. While committees mainly consist of faculty who will, for the most part, select their future colleague, most committee members are from fields that are adjacent to the research field of the vacant professorship. Drawing on the reviews, the application materials, and personal encounters during talks and interviews, committees compile a shortlist of two to four applicants. Together with a document called laudation, the shortlist is submitted to subsequent decision-making bodies in the university administration. The purpose of the laudation is to recommend the shortlisted candidates to the rector and the state ministry who formally offer the professorship—usually to the candidate at the top of the shortlist.

How exactly do appointment procedures influence the social mobility of professors in the field? A lack of success in one appointment procedure does not amount to exclusion from the field, as professorial candidates participate in several appointment procedures throughout their careers. Nonetheless, academic careers are fundamentally contingent upon professorial appointment procedures. While scholars in academic labor markets in other countries can obtain tenured positions at earlier stages (before being granted a full professorship), it is a particularity of the German university labor market that only full professors have tenured positions as civil servants, a status that brings material security (cf. Musselin 2010). Usually, although not automatically, a full professorship also entails greater symbolic authority and visibility (see Angermuller 2017), in part because individual professors have their own budget funds and research staff, for which they make autonomous hiring decisions.

In history, the discipline covered in the data, scholars usually transition to an established position—that is, their first full professorship—in their early 40s. In the 2000s, about 30 full professorships became available each year, which translates to a ratio of available professorships to candidates of 1:8.[6] This ratio is somewhat cyclical; currently, a higher number of history professors are retiring or approaching retirement (Lincke and Paletschek 2002). In certain ways, the labor market in the focal period of study (1955–1985) was less competitive. The educational expansion of the 1960s and 1970s brought many new positions, in part because several universities were founded during that time. This expansion explains why the median age

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[5] The number of reviews in an archival appointment record varies across the 144 appointment procedures in our sample. Most records include three to four reviews, while some outliers include nine or more reviews. A few archival records also do not include any reviews, which probably just means that the reviews have not been archived for this particular procedure.

[6] This ratio does not consider differences between sub-disciplinary fields. In bigger sub-fields like modern history the ratio is actually closer to 1:13.

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216 for first appointment to a full professorship in history was 37.7 in 1977 (Lincke and
217 Paletschek 2002).[7]

Gatekeeping in stand-up comedy

219 To study career gatekeeping processes in stand-up comedy, we focus on selection
220 processes that are taking place prior and during the biggest annual convention of the
221 North-American comedy industry: the Just for Laughs Festival (JFL Festival). Held
222 every summer in Montreal, Canada, the JFL Festival occupies an important role in
223 the North American field of stand-up comedy. It is not only attended by a large num-
224 ber of comedians but also a wide array of so called "industry representatives" who
225 work for organizations that hire comedians, including television networks, agencies,
226 and production companies. Apart from networking with other intermediaries in the
227 field, these industry representatives visit the JFL every year to scout for new talent
228 and sign comedians for contracts for a variety of jobs, including stand-up produc-
229 tions, TV shows and or acting roles. The festival thus serves as a central marketplace
230 for the allocation of jobs and positions within the field of stand-up comedy.[8]

231 Our analysis of gatekeeping processes at the JFL Festival focuses on the Festi-
232 vals' annual series of "New Faces" shows which have a field-wide reputation for
233 being a crucial career springboard and rite of passage for stand-up comedians. Par-
234 ticipation in one of these shows can lead to major career breakthroughs because the
235 New Faces series is consciously designed by the festival organizers as a public audi-
236 tion where unestablished early-career stage comedians can vie for attention of key
237 gatekeepers in the field of stand-up comedy.

238 This public selection process is roughly organized into two stages: an audition
239 stage prior to the festival and the New Faces shows during the festival itself. Dur-
240 ing the audition stage, scouts working on behalf of the festival actively scout for
241 comedians across the country and organize auditions in major cities across the
242 United States (most importantly Los Angeles, New York City, and Chicago); they
243 then invite 40–50 comedians to appear at the "New Faces" shows at JFL. The main
244 gatekeepers at this stage of the process are comedy scouts that work for the fes-
245 tival. During the festival itself, the festival organizers typically host three to four
246 New Faces shows, each featuring eight to ten comedians. Each of these comedians
247 have a 5- to 10-min slot to perform a selection of their best material in front of an

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7FL01 [7] It is a bit more complicated to hypothesize about the ratio between available professorships and can-
7FL02 didates during the period of study. We know there were relatively more positions available. In several
7FL03 cases, the minutes of the meetings of appointment commissions actually note peers complaining about
7FL04 a lack of suitable candidates, or a lack of supply on the market. At the same time, the archival records
7FL05 facilitate a reliable overview of the applications for professorships, and these records suggest that, in the
7FL06 course of the educational expansion, the academic field was more open to newcomers and lateral entries,
7FL07 which would increase the number of candidates.

8FL01 [8] In this regard, the role of the JFL Festival in the North American field of stand-up comedy is compara-
8FL02 ble to the Fringe Festival in the field of British comedy (studied by Friedman 2014), as well as to similar
8FL03 field-coordinating events in other cultural fields, such as the fashion week in Paris (studied by Godart and
8FL04 Mears 2009).

248 audience composed mostly of members of the comedy industry. The main gatekeep-
249 ers at this stage are bookers working on behalf of television networks, agencies and
250 other organization in the entertainment industry.

251   Compared to professorial appointment procedures, then, the JFL Festival pre-
252 sents us with a case of career gatekeeping in which gatekeeping is not cast as a for-
253 mal bureaucratic procedure but as a tournament-like public selection process. The
254 ultimate reward in this tournament is to land a development contract with a major
255 entertainment organization, such as an agency, production company, or television
256 network. In any given year, only a handful comedians succeed in obtaining such a
257 contract at the JFL Festival. Most contestants return from the festival without receiv-
258 ing any immediate benefits.[9] However, those comedians who are successful reap a
259 wide array of benefits that are associated with obtaining a contract with a major
260 "player" in the comedy industry, including an exposure to a much wider audience,
261 improved financial security and contacts that can lead to future job opportunities.
262 Via its New Faces shows, the JFL Festival thus contributes to central career gate-
263 keeping processes in the field of stand-up comedy.

Data, methods, and comparative methodology

265 Our analysis of career gatekeeping processes in stand-up comedy and academia uses
266 data from two different studies conducted by the authors. The analysis of profes-
267 sorial appointments draws on appointment records for 144 appointment procedures
268 that took place between 1950 and 1985 at history departments at 16 German uni-
269 versities.[10] The records comprise documents that reveal the official narrative for
270 the most important steps of professorial appointment procedures. Most gatekeeping
271 practices, in particular those that are decisive for career trajectories, occur behind
272 closed doors and are not accessible to researchers. However, because professorial
273 appointments occur in an organizational context, important aspects of the gatekeep-
274 ing process are documented in archived records. To be sure, this material provides
275 data on the official aspects of the appointment, information that was considered
276 appropriate for archiving. Recorded documents constitute an official front stage
277 (see Prior 2012). In terms of analytical potential, however, this does not make them
278 less valuable than, for example, transcripts from participant observation. Rather,
279 our data provide insight into what is considered to be the legitimate narrative of the

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9FL01   [9] A scout working for the JFL Festival estimated that 250–300 comedians participate in the annual audi-
9FL02 tions for the festival (McCarthy 2016). From this pool of comedians, about 40 receive an invitation to
9FL03 perform Montreal, which corresponds to about 13–16% of the initial pool of comedians participating in
9FL04 the auditions.

10FL01   [10] Access was requested from archives at 30 universities; 14 university archives were either not in pos-
10FL02 session of appointment records or denied access because they deemed that the retention period of the
10FL03 respective records was not over. Archival rights prevent access to records from appointment procedures
10FL04 after 1985 because participants are usually still alive. The sampled records vary with respect to several
10FL05 dimensions, such as age of the university, size of the department, and career stage of the candidates.

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appointment procedure.[11] An important advantage of our archival data is that they cover the entire institutional procedure, from the job advertisement to the concluding negotiations between an applicant and the rector. Appointment records reveal the distinct stages of the process and allow us to analyze each stage, and thus are particularly suited to a study of the processual character of gatekeeping.

The analysis of gatekeeping processes in the field of stand-up comedy is based on data from an in-depth study of hiring processes in the North American stand-up comedy industry that was conducted between 2012 and 2014 (with a follow-up in 2016). As in academic appointment procedures, a large part of gatekeepers' evaluations of candidates occurs behind closed doors and thus is not accessible for researchers. However, we were able to solicit accounts of gatekeepers involved in the selection process using qualitative interviews with long-term scouts working for the JFL Festival and a survey of bookers attending the festival. In both the interviews and the survey we asked respondents to explain how they evaluate and select comedians. We supplement these data with ethnographic observations made at shows and social gathering points during the festival, as well as written accounts of the inner dynamics of the JFL Festival published by comedians and journalists.

The two case studies use different methods to study and compare gatekeeping processes, in part owing to the difference in the social organization of the two cultural fields we study. Professorial appointments are formal procedures that take place in formal organizations and thus leave documentary traces in archives. Booking processes at the JFL Festival, in contrast, are largely informal and are rarely systematically documented. Therefore, our study draws on different methods to gain insights into the structure of gatekeeping processes across our two cases. In doing so, we build on Mears (2014) who discusses how decision-making in cultural fields can be productively studied using an array of different methods.

However, there are also analytical challenges that come with pairing two case studies that use different methodological approaches. One important challenge is that the different methods of our case studies may depict gatekeeping processes in distinct ways. For example, the analysis of archival documents might convey the impression of gatekeeping as a rather bureaucratic procedure, while interviews could privilege narratives of field members about gatekeeping processes (cf. Lamont and Swidler 2014). The design of our comparative study does not allow us to eliminate this possibility entirely. However, the primary aim of our study is to document variation in gatekeeping practices. Hence, the value of our comparative study does not necessarily rely on controlling the data sources between the two cases. We will return to this methodological question concerning our different methods and data sources when discussing the findings of our cross-field comparison.

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[11] Of course, archival records have their own peculiarities and limitations that must be considered. If this is achieved, alleged deficits become sociological phenomena in their own right, referring to the organizational and bureaucratic contexts in and for which appointment records are produced and received. Following Garfinkel (1967), there are 'good' organizational reasons for 'bad' records, and these reasons are highly relevant for sociological research.

Typecasting, comparison, and legitimation in gatekeeping processes

We use insights from existing research on gatekeeping and the sociology of (e)valuation (Lamont 2012) to guide our comparative analysis of gatekeeping practices in gatekeeping processes in academia and stand-up comedy. This body of literature offers useful analytic distinctions for the study of the practices of career gatekeeping as it has drawn attention to a number of distinct practices that are a common part of gatekeeping in cultural fields. In this paper, we focus on three such practices—typecasting, comparison, and legitimation—with the goal to produce findings across several steps of the gatekeeping process (evaluation and validation) and to shed light on cross-field differences in how these practices manifest across different cultural fields.

By focusing on *typecasting*, we examine practices by which candidates' employment opportunities in a labor market can be constrained due to their social attributes or prior employment history (cf. Faulkner 1983; Zuckerman et al. 2003; Friedman and O'Brien 2017). Employers frequently look for a particular type of candidate based on the job they are hiring for and therefore evaluate prospective candidates based on how well they fit that type. Second, we focus on practices of *comparison* by which career gatekeepers assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of different candidates. Such practices of comparisons can be more or less formalized (cf. Posselt 2016), and the criteria mobilized for comparisons depend on the specific field context as well as gatekeepers' position within a given field (cf. Guetzkow et al. 2004; Nylander 2014). Third, we focus on *legitimation* as a practice by which powerful gatekeeping decisions are made comprehensible, plausible, and acceptable (cf. Bielby and Bielby 1994; Franssen and Kuipers 2013). Gatekeepers have to legitimize their decisions because they regulate access to established positions and thus contribute to the maintenance of inequality, and because gatekeepers are accountable to stakeholders for the decisions they make. Analyzing practices of typecasting, comparison, and legitimation, we investigate the different forms these practices take in career gatekeeping in academia and stand-up comedy.

Typecasting in professorial appointment procedures

Gatekeeping practices in professorial appointment procedures rely on typecasting, in which candidates are screened according to and matched with specific categories that are considered relevant for the job at hand. One important point of reference for the mobilization of said categories in professorial appointment procedures are published job advertisements. Most advertisements are comprised of only a few sentences that evoke a rather general and succinct profile of the ideal candidate.[12] A typical example in our sample reads: "The following professorship is to be filled at [a university]: Professor for Ancient History. Remit: Among other fields, the applicant

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[12] Research on more recent job advertisements for German professors shows that the advertisements are becoming longer, include more criteria, and are thus more detailed (Klawitter 2015). We do not observe such a development in our period of study.

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356 should have worked in constitutional and social history. Qualifications: Habilitation
357 is required."[13] Albeit they are rather brief and sober, job advertisements represent
358 an important backdrop for the typecasting of candidates. The advertisements mobi-
359 lize categories that are recognized in the field and thus inform the reviewers' and
360 committee's assessments throughout the appointment procedure. As indicated by the
361 above quote, the categories designate the research field that the future holder of the
362 professorship is supposed to work in. By emphasizing expertise in specific research
363 fields as an important criterion for candidates, job advertisements illustrate that aca-
364 demic labor markets are highly fragmented on the basis of intellectual specializa-
365 tions. Most professorships are designated to research fields when they are adver-
366 tised; some of the fields are so small that the pool of candidates is limited to a few
367 dozen that can meet this criterion.

368 Importantly, the categories that are explicitly stated in the job advertisement are
369 not the only categories that orient the committee's typecasting. They are comple-
370 mented by more tacit categories that can be equally important for the selection of
371 candidates, but that are not always clearly defined and openly stated in an appoint-
372 ment procedure. For example, a department may have to cope with a large number
373 of students and thus stress the importance of teaching skills, or pursue an implicit
374 research agenda and make specific a research expertise of candidates a criterion. The
375 subsequent expectations toward candidates are usually not made explicit in the job
376 advertisement, but they can still be familiar to members of the department and the
377 field alike. Both explicit categories from the job advertisement and tacit categories
378 serve as anchors for subsequent typecasting.

379 Typecasting plays a paramount role in two situations throughout appointment
380 procedures: We observe the first situation of typecasting in the external reviews that
381 committees solicit from peers in the research field of the vacant professorship in
382 question. Reviewers assess candidates according to research and teaching perfor-
383 mance as well as their experience in administrative duties. The reviewers then match
384 the candidates with the requirements set down in the job advertisements. For exam-
385 ple, one reviewer in our sample introduced his review stating that he "examined the
386 professional qualifications of [a candidate] according to the text of the job applica-
387 tion". Another reviewer asserted that a candidate "meets the requirements stated in
388 the job advertisement by all accounts." Only few reviewers go beyond the catego-
389 ries that are specified in the job advertisements and anticipate further expectations
390 and demands for the vacant position. In an attempt to mobilize tacit categories, one
391 reviewer explained:

392 The work of [a candidate] combines empirical rigor with theoretical penetra-
393 tion of problems. Because of his way of doing research, he appears to be espe-
394 cially suitable for the chair of 'Theory of History', whose occupant should
395 not only have a theoretical interest, but be qualified by theoretically informed
396 empirical historiography.

13FL01 [13] All quotes have been translated from German. In order to guarantee anonymity for those involved in
13FL02 the procedures, we omit information that would allow the identification of individuals.

The second situation of typecasting takes place in the laudation, the document in which the committee rationalizes its selection of shortlisted candidates toward the subsequent decision-making bodies within the university. While external reviewers can only ever try to anticipate the local demands for a vacant position, as they are, by definition, external to the appointing department, the committee is much more familiar with the specific expectations at the department. Thus, one committee deemed that a candidate would "definitely be qualified to fulfil the duties at [the appointing department]." Another committee stated more explicitly in its laudation:

> In its choice of candidates for the shortlist, the committee has been led by the necessity to appoint a personality that has not only scientific achievements, but also the ability to effectively support the existing professors in accomplishing the educational and organizational duties in our overcrowded field.

Committees screen candidates according to categories that refer to local requirements and expectations of the appointing department. These concerns are mostly unknown to other participants of the procedure, candidates and reviewers alike, because they remain implicit throughout large parts of the procedure. While tacit categories play an important role for committees' typecasting, it is interesting to note that only few committees in our sample match the candidates' profile with the categories that are made explicit in the job advertisement.

Typecasting in booking processes in stand-up comedy

Typecasting is also widely prevalent in career gatekeeping processes in stand-up comedy. However, in contrast to typecasting in professorial appointment procedures, typecasting in the field of comedy tends to revolve around a different set of categories. While decision-makers in appointment procedures frequently evaluate candidates based on professional criteria, gatekeepers in stand-up comedy routinely evaluate candidates through the prism of ascriptive categories such as gender, race, sexual orientation, or age.

We find that candidates' social identity can shape gatekeepers' selection decisions in several ways. Probably the clearest case of typecasting we observe are so called "diversity bookings." This term refers to situations in which gatekeepers explicitly consider the social identity of candidates, typically with the intention to bring more attention to particular type of social identity that has previously been underrepresented in comedy or particular sub-markets of the field. Our data indicates that diversity bookings are most common during the audition stage through which comedians are selected to perform in Montreal. The bookers who are conducting these auditions are generally highly attuned to comedians' membership in racial, ethnic, or sexual categories. For example, one booker who is working for the JFL Festival organization explained in an interview: "You have to make sure you have a diverse list [of comedians], you know, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation— we want to make sure to be representative of the entire community […], you know, you don't want all white males." While it is not clear to what extent the promotion of diversity is a formalized goal for the organizers of the JFL Festival, we found

439 remarkable consistency in the accounts of several bookers who are involved in this
440 pre-selection stage.[14]

441   During the JFL Festival selection decisions also frequently involve typecasting
442 but are undergirded by a different logic than diversity bookings. At this stage of
443 the selection process, we can distinguish between two evaluative practices through
444 which gatekeepers make selection decisions that rely on typecasting. First, bookers
445 frequently consider the social identity of comedians when making selection deci-
446 sions because they assume that comedians' identity shapes their point of view as
447 performers and the jokes they write. For example, a white working-class woman
448 in her mid-30s who talks about her experiences as a single mom is deemed a very
449 different type of comedian than a college-educated, Asian, male performer who
450 makes jokes about being gay. This intimate connection between comedians' identity
451 and their comic material was frequently alluded to in interviews we conducted with
452 bookers. Consider, for example, the following description that a scout of the JFL
453 Festival offered in an interview:

454   There's a new SNL writer named Julio Torres who got Just for Laughs 2
455   years ago and he's extremely alternative. He's a gay guy from El Salvador and
456   he likes to throw diamonds in the air. I'm like, 'he works much better at an
457   upright citizens' style small black-box theater.' He's not going to do anything
458   at Madison Square Garden but he's very funny and we don't want to lose out
459   on that.

460 Our data indicates that the connection between comedians' identity and material is
461 most salient to gatekeepers when booking comedians for conventional stand-up jobs,
462 such as TV specials or produced shows. In this situation, gatekeepers essentially
463 play the role of matchmakers (Friedman 2014): Their job is to select a particular
464 type of comedian whose comic personae and material represent a good match for a
465 given target audience. As one booker explained this form of gatekeeping decision:
466 "For this [name of TV show] we would book a lot of female comedians because
467 we had to appeal to a lot of American soccer moms, but many of those comedians
468 would not have been strong enough for the [name of late night TV show] which we
469 also produce."

470   We can distinguish a second practice of typecasting during the JFL Festival that
471 is not oriented toward the material of the comedians, but toward their fit for TV
472 or movie roles. Since the festival also attracts intermediaries working on behalf of
473 agencies, motion picture studios and television companies, comedians may not only
474 get hired for traditional stand-up comedy jobs, but also for scripted roles on TV or
475 in movie productions. Such acting jobs typically come in the form of clearly defined
476 roles which means that gatekeepers who are seeking to hire comedians for such roles

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14FL01 [14] It is worth emphasizing, however, that the range of meanings of diversity that bookers consider tends
14FL02 to be relatively narrow. It is mostly limited to either gender and ethno-racial diversity, while other dimen-
14FL03 sions of diversity remain unconsidered. For example, few bookers consider age as an important source of
14FL04 diversity. This lack of attention to candidates' age is reflected in the line-ups of the Festival's annual New
14FL05 Faces shows, which are typically dominated by candidates in their early 20s to 40s.

477 typically have a very clear agenda of what type of comedian they are looking for
478 when attending the annual JFL Festival: They may be producing a show for televi-
479 sion for which they are scouting for a young Asian comedian, or they may be rep-
480 resentatives of a Hollywood talent agency seeking to add a Latina actor to its ros-
481 ter. Since stand-up comedy is a cultural field with strong ties to television, film and
482 other branches of the entertainment industry where such typecasting has been shown
483 to be widespread (see Zuckerman et al. 2003), it should not come as a surprise that it
484 is also widely prevalent in stand-up comedy.

485 Summing up, typecasting in stand-up comedy revolves around *ascriptive catego-*
486 *ries* like gender or race that concern the candidates' social identity. While the cat-
487 egories of the typecasting are *mostly explicit* and accessible to all participants of the
488 booking process, typecasting can serve *various purposes*: It can take the form of
489 politically motivated 'diversity bookings', it can be oriented toward the comedians'
490 material, or toward their fit for specific TV or movie roles.

491 In contrast, the typecasting of gatekeepers in professorial appointment procedures
492 is mostly oriented toward *professional criteria* that are either *explicit* and stated in
493 the job advertisements, or they remain *tacit* and thus not easily accessible to all par-
494 ticipants of the procedure. The typecasting appears to serve the *single purpose* of
495 finding the candidate that is the best fit for the vacant position (see Table 1).

Comparison in professorial appointment procedures

497 Comparison is another important gatekeeping practice in both bookings in stand-
498 up comedy and professorial appointment procedures. In the case of professorial
499 appointments, committees draw on explicit and often rather extensive compari-
500 sons of candidates. Comparisons play an important role at the screening stage at
501 the beginning of the appointment procedure, when committees have to compare
502 many very different candidates according to a set of common criteria. At this stage,
503 committees systematically compare candidates according to criteria stated in the
504 job advertisement. Some of these criteria are straightforward and easy to deter-
505 mine (for example, candidates' age, and when they have completed the habilitation)
506 while other criteria are more ambiguous and harder to assess (for example, candi-
507 dates' international orientation, and how well their research matches the research
508 agenda stated in the job advertisement). With respect to the first type of qualifica-
509 tions (straightforward), one reviewer in the sample suggested to the committee that,
510 "several applicants in the final selection are habilitated, while others have not yet
511 got over this examination procedure." A note from a committee meeting provides an
512 example of a more ambiguous criterion, stating that, "according to the job advertise-
513 ment, only those applicants should be longlisted that have so far been working in the
514 fields of late antiquity or early Middle Ages. A declaration of intent for future work
515 in these fields is not sufficient." This quote shows that committees draw on specific
516 criteria to sort and reduce the field of candidates to a more manageable size.

517 As part of their deliberation process, committees also draw on comparisons that
518 are conducted by the external reviewers. Many reviews explicitly compare the candi-
519 dates. This is a demanding task, as emphasized by one reviewer in our sample:

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Table 1 Differences and similarities in gatekeeping processes in academia and stand-up comedy[a]

	Appointment procedures for full professors at German universities	Selection of comedians for contracts during annual JFL Festival
Typecasting	Oriented toward professional criteria Serving a single purpose: fit	Revolving around ascriptive criteria Serving multiple purposes: political, material, fit
Comparison	Oriented toward specific performance criteria Conducted in a systematic fashion	Holistic, based on overall impressions Conducted ad-hoc, guided by gut-feeling
Legitimation	Via third party endorsements by peer reviews Via transparency of certain parts of the procedure	Via third party endorsements by other gatekeepers Via the ritualized cultural script of a public audition

[a]The differences described in the table are to be understood as gradual rather than absolute

> I am glad that, with the six colleagues that the committee asked me to review, six renowned scholars have applied [for the professorship]. […] As fortunate as this list of applications might be for the department, it somehow leaves the reviewer in a tight spot: He has to establish an order where he perceives less a gradation in quality, but, rather, different distributions of scholarly interests.

Reviews usually compare candidates by discussing them consecutively and then relating them to each other at the end of the review, a direct and explicit comparison that is often incorporated into the decision that the committee makes on the shortlist. One reviewer concluded that "the academic achievements of [a candidate] are not fully evolved, particularly not in comparison with [another candidate]." It is rare that reviewers' comparisons are as clear cut as in this statement. Usually, comparative assessments are more nuanced, weighing different professional criteria. In their comparison, external reviewers mobilize criteria that are concerned with research and teaching performance as well as administrative credentials. The research foci of the candidates and the scope of their publications are particularly important. One candidate in the sample was deemed inferior to other candidates because "the methods he applies and his research questions are neither as diverse nor do they as systematically include the neighboring discipline as demonstrated by [a preferred candidate]." Many reviews end with a rank order of candidates. One reviewer openly admits that these rank orders can be rather fragile: "I want to emphasize that I am only recommending this distinct rank order because […] this has been requested from the committee. I will not conceal that I could argue for and justify any other order." These rank orders precede the shortlist of the committee, sometimes they are even presented as an explicit suggestion by the reviewers. In fact, as we will show in the following section on legitimation, many committees refer to the reviews to legitimize their shortlist.

The committee justifies its selection of shortlisted candidates in the laudation, a document that serves two purposes: to praise the entire slate of candidates on the shortlist while simultaneously conveying a finely nuanced gradation between the

remaining candidates. This gradation is primarily based on the candidates' respective quality in terms of research, teaching, and administrative duties. Some laudations are not comparative, but individually assess shortlisted candidates on their own. However, most laudations contain plentiful and rich comparisons. For example, one laudation concluded:

> Each of the three applicants is qualified to represent the subject of ancient history at the University of Frankfurt. However, [one applicant] should—not without once again highlighting his competences and achievements—be nominated behind [two other applicants] in view of his academic work up to now.

Many laudations also relate their comparison to the typecasting described in the previous section. For example, one committee stated that "the requirement of thematic breadth and sound research that has been leading the selection of the committee has been fulfilled best by [a candidate] in comparison to the other candidate." Another laudation praises a candidate, but ultimately comes to the conclusion that, "with view on the job advertisement, [a candidate] is clearly behind the two candidates at the top of the shortlist."

Comparison in booking processes in stand-up comedy

Drawing comparisons between candidates is also a common practice of career gatekeepers in stand-up comedy, but there are important differences with respect to how gatekeepers engage in these comparisons. First, we find that gatekeepers' comparisons of candidates in the case of stand-up comedy are not as systematic as in professorial appointment procedures and remain largely ad-hoc. Second, we find that gatekeepers in stand-up comedy tend to compare candidates holistically rather than by drawing on specific criteria of comparison.

The holistic character of comparisons is well illustrated by the practices of gatekeepers at the audition stage for the JFL Festival. At this stage, scouts and bookers working for the JFL Festival hold live auditions in comedy clubs across the United States with the goal to select a small number of comedians for the Festival's "New Faces" series. As part of these auditions, aspiring comedians typically get a chance to perform a 5–10 min set in front of a live audience and bookers of the JFL Festival. This format naturally invites bookers to draw comparisons between different candidates. However, instead of comparing candidates based on a range of clearly defined criteria, bookers typically focus on their overall impression of comedians' stage performance. For example, one JFL booker stated: "Of course, I'm looking for stage presence, and timing, but in the end, it is whether it engages you, whether it captivates you, intrigues you in a way that get you thinking." This statement illustrates that even though there are some specific criteria that bookers could use to draw comparisons between candidates (for example, "timing" or "stage-presence"), bookers typically assess comedians' performance (and potential) holistically. This is not to say that gatekeepers do not occasionally rely on a number of more specific criteria of comparison. For example, they may consider a comedian's age or past achievement and compare it to that of other candidates. However, such focused

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592 comparisons of candidates are not given the same weight as comparisons that are
593 guided by holistic overall impressions, and they are rarely conducted in a systematic
594 way. This leads us to the second difference that our analysis reveals: The ad-hoc
595 nature of gatekeepers' comparisons.

596 Gatekeepers' reliance on ad-hoc comparisons is particularly well illustrated by
597 the process through which booking decisions are made during the JFL Festival.
598 Above we have described how professorial appointment processes involve external
599 reviews and other formal steps through which candidates are systematically com-
600 pared. In contrast, booking processes at the JFL Festival do not involve formalized
601 document-based comparisons between candidates. In our ethnographic research at
602 the JFL Festival, we find no evidence that bookers systematically compare candi-
603 dates to each other before making hiring decisions. While doing observations at
604 several New Faces shows, we did not observe any bookers taking systematic notes
605 on comedians' performances. Instead, bookers seem to conduct their comparisons
606 largely spontaneously and ad-hoc. Hence, bookers base their hiring decisions pri-
607 marily on their overall impression of comedians' performance during the Festival's
608 New Faces shows as well as hear-say about comedians' reputation, which bookers
609 solicit through gossip, rather than a formal document-based process.

610 Summing up, we find that candidates in stand-up comedy are not compared
611 according to specific criteria, but rather *holistically*, following the bookers' overall
612 impression of their performance on stage. In addition, gatekeepers' comparisons of
613 candidates do not rely on a formal procedure or formal devices, but remain largely
614 *ad-hoc*.

615 In contrast, comparisons in professorial appointment procedures are not ad-hoc,
616 but drawn in a rather *systematic* fashion. Comparisons are conducted explicitly and
617 supported by the documents like reviews and laudations, and the formal conven-
618 tions that come with them. Comparisons are also not primarily guided by gut-feel-
619 ing, but mainly by *specific performance criteria* that are established in the field (see
620 Table 1).

Legitimation in professorial appointment procedures

622 Consistent with prior scholarship on gatekeeping (see Bielby and Bielby 1994;
623 Franssen and Kuipers 2013), we find that gatekeepers in academia and stand-up
624 comedy not only make powerful selection decisions, but also need to legitimize
625 these decisions to various stakeholders. In the case of professorial appointment pro-
626 cedures, the legitimation of selection decisions is particularly important because of
627 the diverse set of stakeholders that are involved in appointing professors, including
628 faculty members of a given department, the university's administrative authorities
629 and the responsible state ministries. Appointment decisions must therefore not only
630 be accepted locally, but across different levels of a formal bureaucratic organiza-
631 tion. What is more, the legitimacy of appointment procedures is also crucial because
632 they entail moments of refusal and rejection, which can increase precariousness and
633 exclude certain individuals.

634   One factor that increases the legitimacy of evaluations in appointment procedures
635 is the use of external reviews in which peers in the field assess the candidates at the
636 request of the committee. Support from external peers stabilizes the evaluation of
637 the committee, because the third-party endorsement lends the evaluation credibil-
638 ity. This was apparent in a laudation in which a committee explicitly quoted from
639 an external review, stating that "according to the judgment of acknowledged sen-
640 ior scholars of early modern history, [a candidate] is 'in the top bracket of younger
641 modern historians in Germany.'" Another exemplary laudation in the sample stated
642 that "all external reviewers agreed that [a candidate] belongs to those younger histo-
643 rians in Germany that have a determining influence on the social scientific realm of
644 historical research."

645   The legitimizing function of reviews becomes most strongly apparent when
646 reviewers *do not* support candidates that are favored by a search committee. These
647 cases are rare in our sample, but they make clear that it is extremely difficult for a
648 committee to shortlist a candidate that is not endorsed by the reviewers. Reviews
649 ensure that judgments are supported by scholars outside the committee and thus
650 appear uncontroversial. However, the legitimizing role of external reviews is a pecu-
651 liar one: While the official function of the external reviews is to present an impartial
652 judgment of the candidates, it is clear from our data that in some appointment pro-
653 cedures, committees merely expect reviewers to affirm their decisions about which
654 candidates to shortlist. This backstage aspect of the procedure is not always visible
655 in archived appointment records, but the data do reveal some exceptions. For exam-
656 ple, one scholar who was solicited to write a so-called courtesy review (*Gefällig-
657 keitsgutachten*) expressed his ethical concerns, stating that these "reviews not only
658 serve a merely confirmatory function, but downright request a confirmation of the
659 previously made decision."

660   The data revealed a second strategy that facilitates the legitimation of gatekeeping
661 decisions in appointment procedures: participants of the procedure make the deci-
662 sion-making process transparent—at least certain parts of it. While most steps of
663 appointment procedures are closed to the public, departments and committees none-
664 theless make some efforts to provide insights into how these decisions are made.[15]
665 One step that increases the transparency of the procedure is the public advertisement
666 of vacant professorships. This is a relatively recent development; the data reveal that
667 as recently as the early 1960s reviewers simply suggested candidates to the commit-
668 tee without a formal job advertisement or application on the part of the candidates. A
669 number of other measures that ensure transparency were also introduced during the
670 1960s: Committees began to take minutes of their meetings and to document who

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15FL01   [15] Because the production of transparency is a complex issue, it is worthwhile to briefly return to the
15FL02 peculiar character of archived appointment records as data, which we discuss in the previous section on
15FL03 data and methods. Drawing on archived records, we must assume that documents, even when their pur-
15FL04 pose is to provide transparency, do not have a revelatory character that exposes how decisions were *really*
15FL05 made (whatever this is supposed to mean precisely). It is more realistic to assume that the archived docu-
15FL06 ments are part of a bureaucratic front stage on which legitimate decision-making procedures are *per-
15FL07 formed* (Prior 2008). However, even if transparency is only performed, it has legitimizing and stabilizing
15FL08 effects (Flyverbom et al. 2015; see also Power 1997).

671 served on the committee. Some universities in our sample even oblige committees to
672 compose reports of the appointment procedure. Documenting every important step
673 of the procedure and including all relevant documents, these reports often exceed 50
674 pages. One of the most important measures to facilitate transparency is the archiving
675 of documents central to the hiring process. This transparency of certain parts of the
676 appointment procedure not only allows for scholars to study appointment procedures
677 in retrospect as we do here, but more importantly legitimizes the final decision,
678 because it provides documentation of the reasoning for certain evaluative decisions,
679 and thus makes the parties involved in the procedure accountable for their decisions.

Legitimation in booking processes in stand-up comedy

681 The legitimacy of gatekeeping decisions also plays an important role in stand-up
682 comedy. Although the established positions that gatekeepers control in stand-up
683 comedy are less permanent compared to a lifetime position of a German professor,
684 bookers still need to ensure to reach selection decisions that find acceptance by vari-
685 ous outside audiences. In the case of the JFL festival, these audiences include the
686 candidates that gatekeepers are evaluating (and those they are rejecting), the leaders
687 of the organizations they are working for (TV network executives, agency bosses
688 etc.) as well as members of the broader stand-up comedy community, including
689 already established comedians.

690 How do bookers legitimize their selection decisions in eyes of these external
691 audiences? Our analysis of the JFL Festival suggests that bookers seek to bolster
692 the legitimacy of their gatekeeping decisions in two main ways. First, and remark-
693 ably similar to gatekeepers in professorial appointment procedures, bookers exten-
694 sively rely on the judgment of other actors to inform their own selection decisions.
695 They consult the opinions of other gatekeepers, comedy critics, comedy consumers
696 and already established comedians to get a more accurate estimation of the "value"
697 of individual comedians who are vying for attention at the JFL Festival. In some
698 cases, gatekeepers rely on the judgment of these other actors as a point of orienta-
699 tion to get a sense of which comedians to watch out for during JFL. For example,
700 one gatekeeper we interviewed explained how he determined which comedians he
701 paid attention to at the festival: "I listened to a selection of comedy whispers, asking
702 them what they think, who is currently hot in the scene, and who the industry thinks
703 is going to pop soon." In other cases, gatekeepers may rely on third-party evalua-
704 tions to validate and justify booking decisions post hoc. For example, if a particu-
705 lar comedian performing at the JFL has received an exceptional degree of attention
706 from comedy critics prior to the festival, gatekeepers can use this information as an
707 argument to justify their selection decisions within the organization they are work-
708 ing for.

709 Second, we find that gatekeeping decisions in stand-up comedy also derive legiti-
710 macy from the way the JFL Festival structures the process through which early-stage
711 comedians are selected for lucrative jobs. The New Faces series of the JFL Festival
712 utilizes a cultural form that is well-established in the cultural industries and per-
713 forming arts: that of a public casting or audition where candidates perform short

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714 samples of their craft in front of judges and a live audience (cf. Muniesa and Helges-
715 son 2013). By mobilizing this widely familiar cultural script, the annual selection
716 process of the JFL Festival takes on a highly ritualized form: it is not only scripted
717 (and thus predictable), but also takes place in front of an audience which according
718 to sociological theories of ritual is crucial for the legitimacy of the outcome of a
719 ritual (Collins 2004).

720 This ritual-like character is discernible already at the audition stage in the months
721 running up to the festival. Auditions largely take the same form year after year, and
722 are typically widely publicized in local stand-up comedy circles via websites and
723 social media. Large numbers of early-career stage comedians are looking forward
724 to these auditions with great anticipation. Later, during the festival itself, the ritual-
725 like character of the selection of comedians is even more pronounced. With its New
726 Faces shows, the festival has created a distinct format dedicated to the selection of
727 up-and-coming comedians which has been running in largely unchanged form for
728 more than 20 years. As such, the New Faces series has become a major focal point
729 for insiders of the field of stand-up comedy. Every year, the festival is also exten-
730 sively covered by press representatives who report on the happenings of the JFL.
731 This press coverage is closely followed by comedians and bookers in the entire field.
732 News about which comedians were discovered at the Festival in a given year quickly
733 becomes common knowledge in the field. Thus, ultimately, the competition for entry
734 into the top segment of the comedy industry during the annual JFL Festival occurs
735 under the watch of the entire comedy community.

736 Summing up, gatekeeping decisions in stand-up comedy derive legitimacy from
737 the way the JFL Festival structures the process according to the familiar and *ritual-*
738 *ized* cultural script of a public casting or audition. Bookers also attempt to back up
739 their decisions by *third party endorsements*, i.e., by seeking the judgment of other
740 gatekeepers to inform their own selection decisions.

741 *Third party endorsements* are also an important source of legitimacy in professo-
742 rial appointment procedures, where external reviews lend the committees' decisions
743 credibility and make them appear uncontroversial. In further attempts to legitimize
744 gatekeeping decisions, participants of the procedure also seek to make parts of the
745 decision-making process *transparent* (see Table 1).

Discussion: understanding variation in career gatekeeping practices in cultural fields

748 In the preceding analysis, we have compared the practices of career gatekeepers in
749 two widely different cultural fields. Despite the differences between our two cases,
750 our analysis shows that career gatekeepers draw on similar practices. Gatekeepers
751 in professorial appointment procedures and in stand-up comedy engage in practices
752 of typecasting, comparison, and legitimation when controlling access to desirable
753 positions in their fields. The prevalence of these practices even across widely differ-
754 ent fields replicates and bolsters findings from the gatekeeping literature (see Zuck-
755 erman et al. 2003 on typecasting; Nylander 2014 on comparison; Chong 2013 on

legitimation). However, we also identify major differences in how gatekeepers perform these practices across our two cases (see Table 1)—which is a novel contribution to the literature on career gatekeeping.

As we will discuss further below, the interpretation of the results of our comparative analysis requires some caution due to the methodological design of our cross-field comparison. Nonetheless, we believe that at least some of the findings of our research can be tied back to two structural differences between our two cases: the different social organization of career gatekeeping in academia and stand-up comedy as well as the different labor markets and career structures that we find in each field. While career gatekeeping processes in the case of German academia is organized as a bureaucratic procedure, gatekeeping in stand-up comedy is organized as a public spectacle. Moreover, while academic labor markets are marked by standardized career structures, careers in stand-up comedy tend to be much more irregular because of the project-based nature of its labor market. In the following few paragraphs, we discuss how these particularities of our cases relate to the differences in typecasting, comparisons, and legitimations that we have revealed.

With respect to *typecasting*, we found that typecasting in professorial appointment procedures is mostly oriented toward professional criteria, and that it serves the purpose of establishing a fit between candidates and the vacant position. We propose that this emphasis on fit may be attributed to the social organization of professorial appointments: They represent procedures that are embedded in the university as the very organizational setting that the given vacant position is located in. More generally, professional criteria and the candidates' fit are crucial because the appointment of a full professor in Germany represents a substantial commitment for the university. Full professors are tenured, they sometimes stay at a university for several decades. Thus, the efforts that committees make to find a suitable candidate that matches the profile of a vacant position as close as possible may be the result of the considerable commitment that a professorial appointment entails. In contrast, typecasting in stand-up comedy revolves more strongly around ascriptive categories that concern candidates' identities, for example, as 'blue collar,' 'female,' or 'ethnic' comedians. While many ascriptive categories may not carry much legitimacy in the context of bureaucratic organizations that have embraced merit-based principles of recruitment, they play an outsized role in entertainment industries such as stand-up comedy because producers' identities are treated as pertinent to the very work they perform. Additionally, we found that typecasting in stand-up comedy may serve multiple purposes: Gatekeepers may consider the social identity of candidates to increase diversity, engage in cultural matching (between comedians and potential audiences), or select comedians for jobs that require a particular identity. We argue that this may be the case because the JFL Festival mediates access to a *range* of desirable positions in the field of stand-up comedy, and not just one type of position as in the case of professorial appointment procedures: Gatekeepers attending the JFL Festival may hire comedians for classical stand-up comedy shows, acting roles, writing jobs etc.

With respect to *comparisons*, we have shown that career gatekeepers in stand-up comedy compare candidates primarily ad-hoc and in a holistic fashion. We propose that this dominant mode of comparison is related to the specific social organization

of the JFL Festival and its New Faces shows. The New Faces series and their pre-
ceding auditions are framed as a public spectacle that puts candidates and their stage
persona in the limelight. Meanwhile, the actors who evaluate comedians remain
largely in the background and are exposed to only little scrutiny. Thus, gatekeep-
ers in stand-up comedy can afford to draw comparisons between candidates that
are ad-hoc and holistic because they are less accountable to outside audiences than
members of academic appointment procedures. In addition, we believe that the ad-
hoc and holistic character of gatekeepers' comparison is also influenced by the low
degree of standardization of careers in stand-up comedy. Because there are no for-
malized ranks that separate different career stages in stand-up comedy, there is no
shared understanding of what skills, credentials, and accomplishments individual
producers need to have accumulated by a given career stage—thus offering gate-
keepers fewer tangible reference points to draw comparisons between candidates.

In contrast, career gatekeepers in professorial appointment procedures engage
more extensively in comparisons. We have shown that their comparisons are
often guided by specific performance criteria and conducted in a rather system-
atic and formalized fashion. We suggest that the formalized character of compari-
sons can be explained by the bureaucratic, procedural character of appointment
procedures, in which principles of procedural justice require that all candidates
be evaluated identically. This is accomplished through formalized documents
such as reviews or laudations which invite systematic comparisons of candidates
at several points of the selection process. Moreover, we argue that the use of tan-
gible performance criteria is related to the comparatively standardized stages of
academic careers (PhD candidate, post-doc, professor, etc.). The rather standard-
ized structure of academic careers enables gatekeepers to orient their compari-
sons toward professional criteria that are tailored to specific career stages.

Lastly, with view on practices of *legitimation*, our analysis has shown that
members of professorial appointment procedures rely on third party endorsements
via external reviews, as well as efforts of rendering the decision-making process
transparent. We argue that the social organization of appointment procedures may
explain why transparency and third party endorsements play an important role.
Committees' decisions have to be legitimate within a rule- and document-based
bureaucratic process. Especially transparency is an important mean of legitima-
tion in such contexts (see Flyverbom et al. 2015). More generally, external peer
reviews play an important role for professorial appointments because the appoint-
ments have to be legitimate across several contexts: the specific organizational
context of the department and the appointing university, the local state [*Land*]
ministry that formally appoints and funds professors, as well as the research field
that is eagerly observing to whom the scarce position of a full professorships is
awarded.

Career gatekeepers in stand-up comedy legitimize their decisions via third party
endorsements as well, but the selection process also derives legitimacy from its rit-
ual-like organization: The JFL Festival has become a rite of passage for up-and-
coming stand-up comedians which is staged in a public and highly ritualized form.
The form of this selection process, in turn, may be seen as a response to the dis-
tinct structure of careers in creative industries such as stand-up comedy. Careers in

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848 stand-up comedy take the form of a sequence of projects and short-term contracts,
849 and comedians may be hired by entertainment organizations for *a range of* different
850 jobs (Reilly 2017). Under these conditions, a public audition that serves as a mar-
851 ketplace for the discovery and selection of talent (such as the festival's New Faces
852 series) is more efficient than a conventional hiring process that is tailored to a spe-
853 cific position with clearly defined responsibilities.

854 It is important to keep in mind that the differences in evaluative gatekeeping
855 practices revealed in this paper are gradual. For example, although we have found
856 that one difference between career gatekeeping in academia and stand-up comedy
857 is the reliance on professional categories in academia and on ascriptive categories
858 in stand-up comedy, we can assume that both professional and ascriptive categories
859 play a role for typecasting in both cases. Likewise, the difference between legiti-
860 macy through transparency and legitimacy through ritualization is also not absolute,
861 but a matter of degree. Just as social life in general is permeated by ritual-like per-
862 formances (Alexander 2004), professorial appointment procedures can have a ritual-
863 like character as well.

864 While our comparative approach allowed us to draw attention to variation in
865 career gatekeeping processes in cultural fields, the comparative design of our study
866 also comes with some limitations. First, we compare two cases of career gatekeep-
867 ing that are not only embedded in two different cultural fields, but also in two dif-
868 ferent historical and cultural contexts. For some of the differences we reveal in this
869 paper, it is likely that they are at least partly the product of the particular historical
870 and cultural contexts our two cases are situated in. For example, the finding that
871 typecasting processes in stand-up comedy revolve more heavily around ascriptive
872 categories than in academia could be partially the product of a period effect: our
873 data on appointment procedures in German academia spans a period from the 1950s
874 to the 1980s, yet it is only in the last few decades that questions of diversity have
875 become more salient in German academia and that universities have embraced poli-
876 cies of equal opportunity. Although we assume ascriptive criteria to be indeed very
877 influential in our period of study (for example, only six of the 199 candidates in our
878 sample are female), only today's policies of equal opportunity and diversity would
879 make the criteria visible in official documents.

880 Second, some of the results of our cross-field comparison require interpretative
881 caution because we used different methodological approaches to gain insights into
882 the evaluative practices of career gatekeepers. It is therefore possible that some of
883 the differences that we document may partly be the result of the different methods
884 and data that our two case studies rely on. For example, our material collected from
885 university archives gives professorial appointments the appearance of being rather
886 formalized procedures in which gatekeepers conduct their assessments in a fairly
887 systematic fashion. The finding that the legitimation of gatekeeping decisions is
888 partly produced through practices of transparency could also have been enhanced
889 by the specific methodological approach: We rely on archived materials that have
890 been produced and preserved for the exact purpose of making the selection process
891 appear transparent. Likewise, participant observation and interviews are methods
892 that require a presence of the researcher on site, observing gatekeeping processes as

893 they unfold. This might invoke the impression that gatekeepers' assessments during
894 the JFL Festival are mostly spontaneous and led by gut-feeling.

895   We are not able to eliminate these and other limitations entirely due to the differ-
896 ent methods and data that our case studies rely on. However, since the main aim of
897 our comparison is to reveal variation in gatekeeping processes, the validity of our
898 findings does not depend on controlling the differences between our two cases.

Conclusion

900 Our study contributes to research on career gatekeeping processes in cultural fields
901 by drawing attention to variation in how career gatekeepers make selection deci-
902 sions for established positions and how these decisions are validated. Leveraging
903 the analytical strength of a cross-field comparison, we show that career gatekeepers
904 deploy seemingly uniform practices such as typecasting, comparison, and legitima-
905 tion, in different ways. We argue that these differences in gatekeeping practices may
906 be related to the social organization of career gatekeeping processes, and the charac-
907 teristics of labor markets and career structures in which cultural producers compete
908 with each other.

909   More research is needed to further examine the relationship between career gate-
910 keeping practices and their social and organizational context. Such research may
911 not only provide insights into how gatekeeping processes may articulate in differ-
912 ent forms across cultural fields, but also how the social and organizational context
913 of gatekeeping processes inform gatekeepers' situated decision-making practices.
914 Another strand of future research could continue the line of analysis started here and
915 examine cross- (as well as within) field variation in the practices that career gate-
916 keepers rely on to make selection decisions and validate their decisions. In doing so,
917 research might identify additional gatekeeping practices beyond typecasting, com-
918 parisons, and legitimation, or reveal yet different ways in which these practices are
919 enacted. Such research could also examine to what extent variation in gatekeepers'
920 practices may have implications for the outcomes of career gatekeeping processes
921 and social inequalities in cultural fields more generally. For example, scholars might
922 ask whether gatekeeping processes that involve systematic (rather than ad-hoc) com-
923 parisons advantage candidates with certain attributes over others, or how typecast-
924 ing based on ascriptive rather than professional criteria affects the career prospects
925 of cultural producers.

926   Irrespective of the specific directions of future research, we believe that more
927 scholarship on career gatekeeping is needed because of the critical role that gate-
928 keeping plays in shaping processes of social mobility in cultural fields. In most cul-
929 tural fields, career gatekeepers routinely introduce discontinuities between contend-
930 ers which can then translate into larger and more sustained differences in prestige
931 and material resources through processes of cumulative advantage which are dif-
932 ficult to stop once they are set in motion (cf. Menger 2014; Merton 1968). A bet-
933 ter understanding of career gatekeeping processes is therefore important not only
934 for students of cultural mediation, but also scholars interested in the production and
935 reproduction of inequality in cultural fields.

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