



TASTE VERSUS THE MARKET: AN EXTENSION OF RESEARCH ON THE CONSUMPTION OF MOTION PICTURES

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*****Based on Work with Michela Addis***
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- As in past presentations, *primary focus*
 - *consumers* (film audience)
 - *rather* than *producers* (motion-picture studios or distributors)
 - concerned, here
 - *not* with the question of what → commercial success
 - box-office ticket sales
 - additional sources of revenue
 - overall profits
 - other measures of financial success
 - but *rather* with the issue of whether
 - *ordinary consumers* (non-expert audience members)
 - have “*good taste*”
- (cf. review by Holbrook 1999 *JCR*)

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- *Many* have the sense that *some* cultural offerings are “*better*” than others (*Citizen Kane* versus *The Forty-Year-Old Virgin*)
- Yet the term “*good taste*” is *dangerous* to use in academic discourse
 - *clashes* with the *postmodern ethos*
 - effacement of boundaries – High Art / pop culture
 - embrace of cultural relativism – all equally “good”
 - denial of differences – high/lowbrow or Art/entertainment
 - *politically incorrect*
 - offends liberal egalitarian sensibilities of editors/reviewers
 - encourages accusations of elitism
- For this reason
 - “*good taste*” appears everywhere in *quotes*
 - we give a very *specific definition* of “good taste”

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- *Specific definition* of “good taste” is based on a concept developed by *Pierre Bourdieu* (1983, 1984, 1986, 1993)
 - a *cultural field* (music, television, theater, cooking, football, wrestling, bullfights ... film)
 - in which certain *experts* (professionals, reviewers, cognoscenti, color commentators, aficionados, ... critics)
 - *recognized* by society as having
 - a *legitimate* claim
 - by virtue of long *training-practice-study*
 - to render *judgments* of what constitutes *excellence* in that particular cultural field

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- Define “*good taste*” as a *strong positive association* between
 - *expert judgment* (e.g., excellence as evaluated by professional film critics) and
 - *popular appeal* (e.g., preferences of ordinary non-expert movie audiences)
- From this, it *follows* that we also must *recognize* the existence of
 - *not only* “good taste” – a strong positive relationship between expert judgment (*EJ*) and popular appeal (*PA*)
 - *but also*
 - “*little taste*” – a *significant-but-weak* association between EJ and PA in the *positive* direction
 - “*no taste*” – a *zero* relationship between EJ and PA
 - even “*bad taste*” – a *negative* association of EJ and PA

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- We might *ask* which of these results
 - we would *expect* to find
 - when *testing* the relationship between EJ and PA *empirically*
- Various *commentators* have suggested that they would expect to find a *negative* association consistent with “*bad taste*” - including
 - any number of *cultural critics* from the *right* (Ortega y Gasset, Eliot), the *left* (Horkheimer, Adorno), and *in-between* (Dwight Macdonald)
 - Pierre *Bourdieu himself* (1983, 1984, 1986, 1993)
 - a table full of *distinguished scholars* at *RCAC* (Paul DiMaggio, William Baumol, Mark Schuster, ...)
 - *yours truly* (when I first began this research)

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- *But* – despite such expectations – the most accurate way to describe the *empirical results* from various studies would be
 - “*little taste*” phenomenon
 - that is, a *significant-but-weak* association
 - in which $r_{PA,EJ}$ or $\beta_{PA,EJ} < .35$
 - meaning an *explained variance* of $r^2 < 10\%$
- This *generalization* applies to
 - work from *many different cultural fields* overall
 - for example,
 - Hirschman and Pieros 1985;
 - Holbrook 2006;
 - Holbrook, Lacher, and LaTour 2006;
 - Luan and Sudhir 2005;
 - Reddy, Swaminathan, and Motley 1998;
 - Schindler, Holbrook, and Greenleaf 1989

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- The “*little taste*” phenomenon appears especially frequently in
 - *over 20 empirical studies of motion pictures* in particular
 - for example,
 - Basuroy, Chatterjee, and Ravid (2003);
 - Basuroy, Desai, and Talukdar (2006);
 - Boatwright, Kamakura, and Basuroy (2005);
 - Dellarocas, Awad, and Zhang (2004);
 - Desai and Basuroy (2005);
 - Elberse and Anand (2005);
 - Eliashberg and Shugan (1997);
 - Hennig-Thurau, Houston, and Walsh (2003);
 - Holbrook (1999);
 - Holbrook (2005);
 - Kamakura, Basuroy, and Boatwright (2006);
 - Litman (1983);
 - Litman and Ahn (1998);
 - Prag and Casavant (1994);
 - Ravid (1999);
 - Ravid, Wald, and Basuroy (2005);
 - Reinstein and Snyder (2005);
 - Sawhney and Eliashberg (1996);
 - Sochay (1994);
 - Wallace, Seigerman, and Holbrook (1993);
 - Zufryden (2000)

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- So the *key question* is
 - *WHY* does this oft-found “*little taste*” *phenomenon* appear?
 - Is it that
 - ordinary consumers are pretty much “cultural dupes” or “cultural dopes” (Adorno and the Frankfurt School)?
 - ordinary consumers lack “cultural capital” resulting from education and are pretty much clueless concerning the arts and entertainment (Bourdieu, other sociologists)?
 - ordinary consumers use cultural offerings for entertainment rather than for aesthetic appreciation (person-on-the-street view or what-a-wonderful-world hypothesis)?

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- I believe the *answer* concerns a potential *intervening variable*
 - namely, *Ordinary Evaluation (OE)*
 - that is,
 - *evaluative judgments of excellence* by
 - *ordinary* consumers or *non-expert* audience members
- Recall
 - Expert Judgment (EJ) = evaluation of excellence by professional critics or other highly-trained authorities
 - Popular Appeal (PA) = liking or enjoyment or patronage by ordinary consumers or non-expert audiences
- So *Ordinary Evaluation (OE)* represents a *third possibility*
 - *evaluation* of excellence
 - by *ordinary* consumers or non-expert audiences

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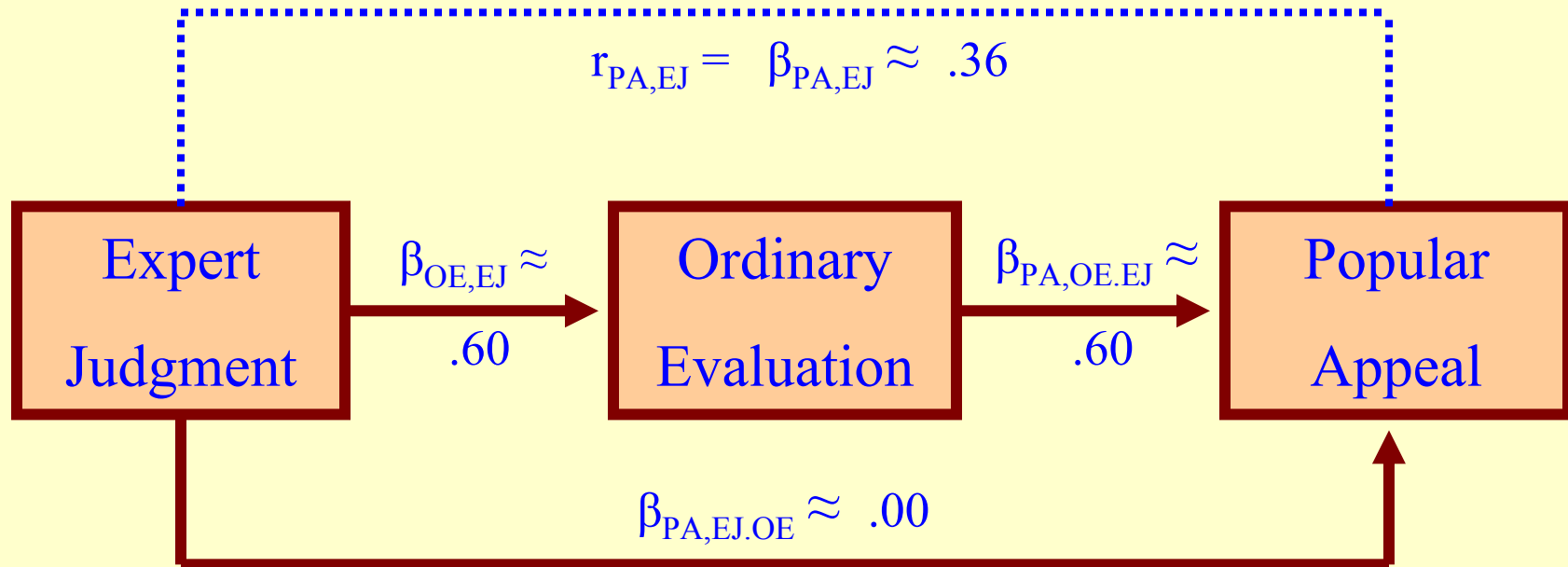
- Notice that we are neglecting a fourth possibility
- Expert Appeal
 - liking or enjoyment
 - by professional critics or other highly-trained authorities
- Might be interesting ... someday
 - but for now
 - seems reasonable to assume
 - experts tend to like what they regard as excellent

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- Potentially, *Ordinary Evaluation (OE)*
 - plays the role of an *intervening variable*
 - that *mediates* the relationship between
 - *Expert Judgment (EJ)*
 - *Popular Appeal (PA)*
 - in a way that is *consistent* with
 - *aspects* of “*good taste*”
 - that *combine* to produce the “*little taste*” phenomenon
- *As follows....*

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- Such a set of relationships would pass the four-part Baron-&-Kenny criteria for mediation
 - the mediation effect $\approx .60 \times .60$
 - where $r \approx .36 \approx .60 \times .60 + .00 \dots r^2 \approx .13$
- So that two aspects of “good taste” combine multiplicatively to produce an overall phenomenon of “little taste”

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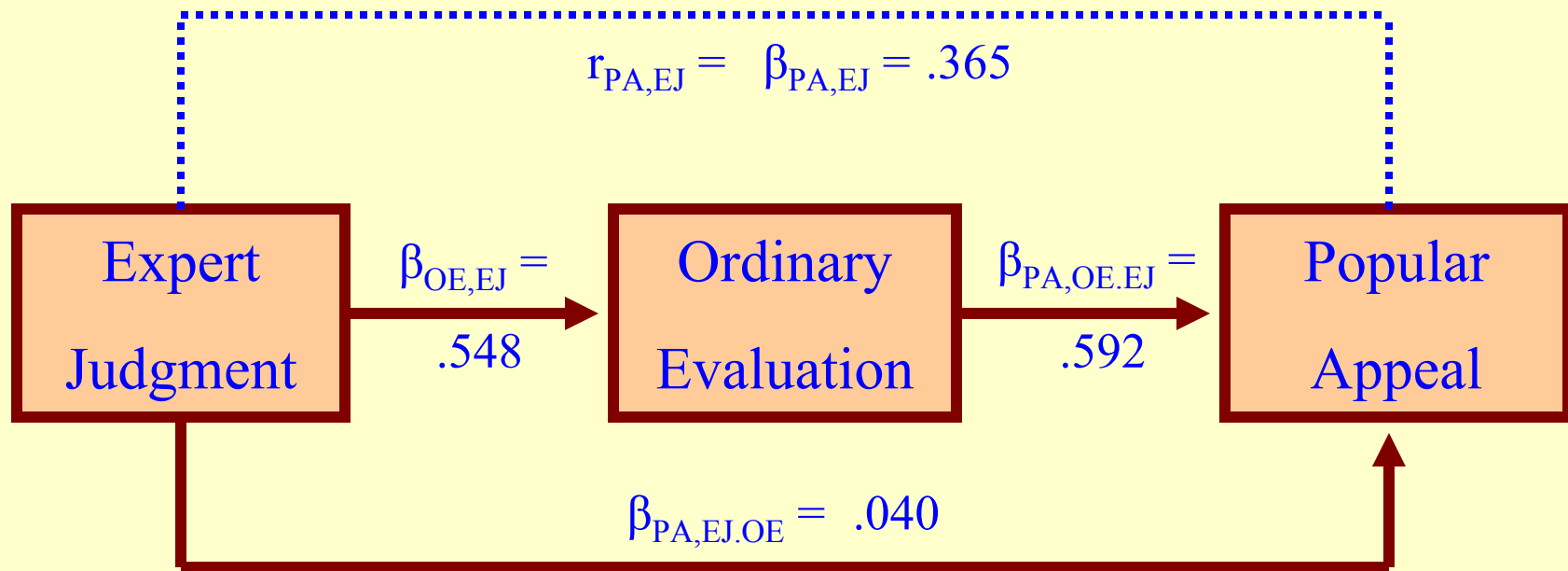
- *Historically,*
 - studies have *not* measured *Ordinary Evaluation (OE)*
 - therefore, have *not* presented data suitable for assessing the plausibility of the *mediation hypothesis*
- However, *two recent studies* have investigated this issue
- *Very quick review*
 - (1) Holbrook, Lacher, and LaTour (2006) in the case of music (*Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*)
 - (2) Holbrook (2005) in the case of motion pictures (*Marketing Letters*)

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- (1) Holbrook, Lacher, and LaTour (*JAMS*, 2006)
 - 200 versions of “My Funny Valentine” (one-chorus excerpts)
 - jazz instrumentals (Miles Davis, Paul Desmond, ...)
 - jazz vocals (Chet Baker, Ella Fitzgerald, ...)
 - pop vocals (Frank Sinatra, Barbra Streisand, ...)
 - easy listening (Roger Williams, 100 Strings, ...)
 - rock (Van Morrison, Jerry Garcia, ...)
 - country (Kenny Rogers, ...)
 - evaluated by three independent samples for
 - Expert Judgment (“excellence,” expert professionals)
 - Ordinary Evaluation (“excellence,” non-expert students)
 - Popular Appeal (“enjoyability,” non-expert students)

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- SO
 - aspects of “good taste”: .548 and .592
 - combine to produce an overall relationship showing “little taste”:
 $r = .365 = .548 \times .592 + .40$... so that ... $r^2 = .133$

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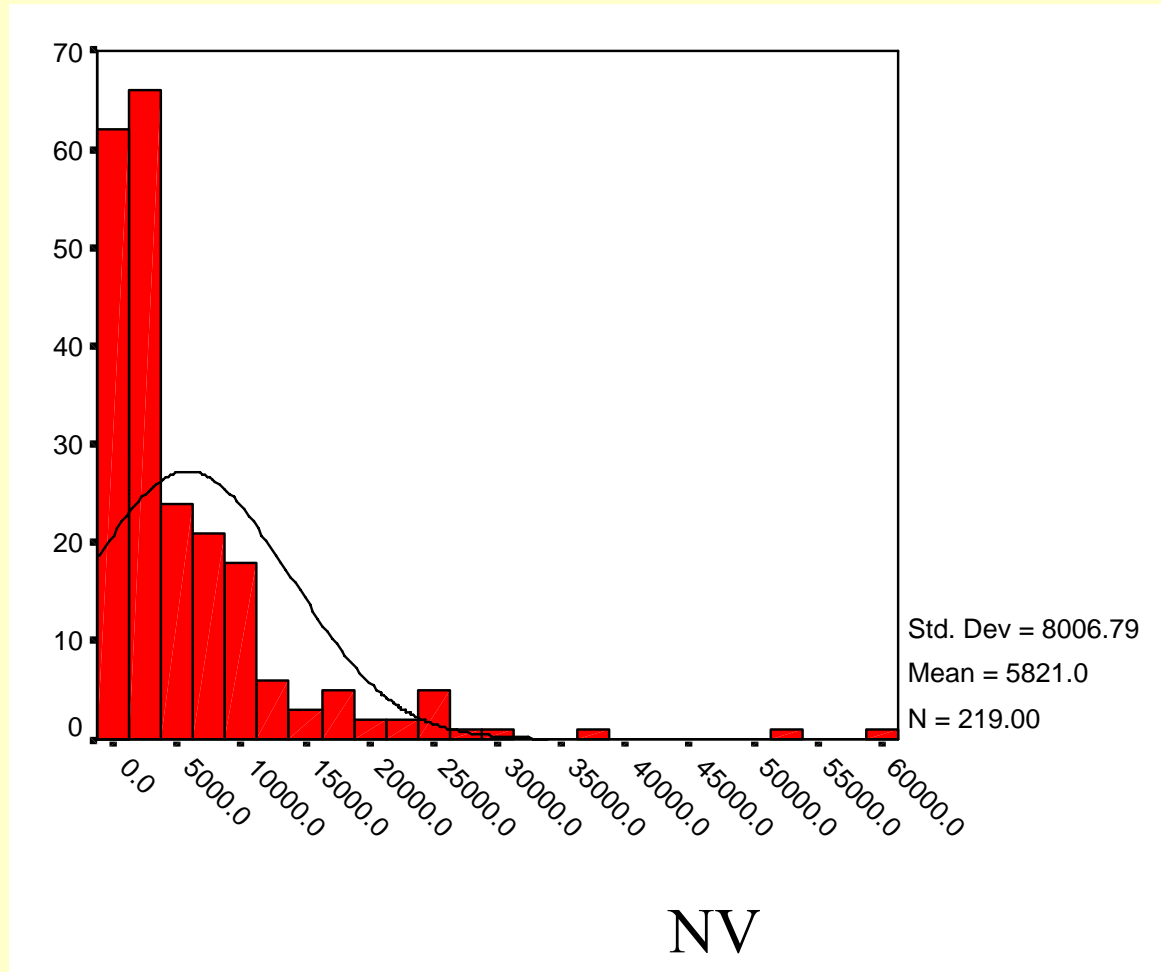
- (2) Holbrook (*Marketing Letters*, 2005)
 - explored the potential mediating role of ordinary evaluation
 - in the case of motion pictures
 - using real-world correlational data
 - used 219 films released in 2000 (worldwideboxoffice.com)
 - measured
 - EJ via an index of ratings from six books by professional critics ($\alpha = .844$; $r_{EJ, RotTom} = .893$)
 - OE via ratings of excellence from IMDb
 - PA via logarithm of number-of-votes (NV) on IMDb
 - the latter measure requires some justification....

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- We *assume* the number-of-votes (NV) for a film
 - *captures* appreciation or enthusiasm; degree of attention; amount of “buzz”; desire to recommend the film to others; word of mouth or “click of mouse”
 - *rather* than any desire to warn others of a bad motion picture – which would lead to a U-shaped relationship
- We also need to worry about
 - skewness)
 - curvilinearity) → logarithmic measure:
 - heteroskedasticity) PA = log(NV)

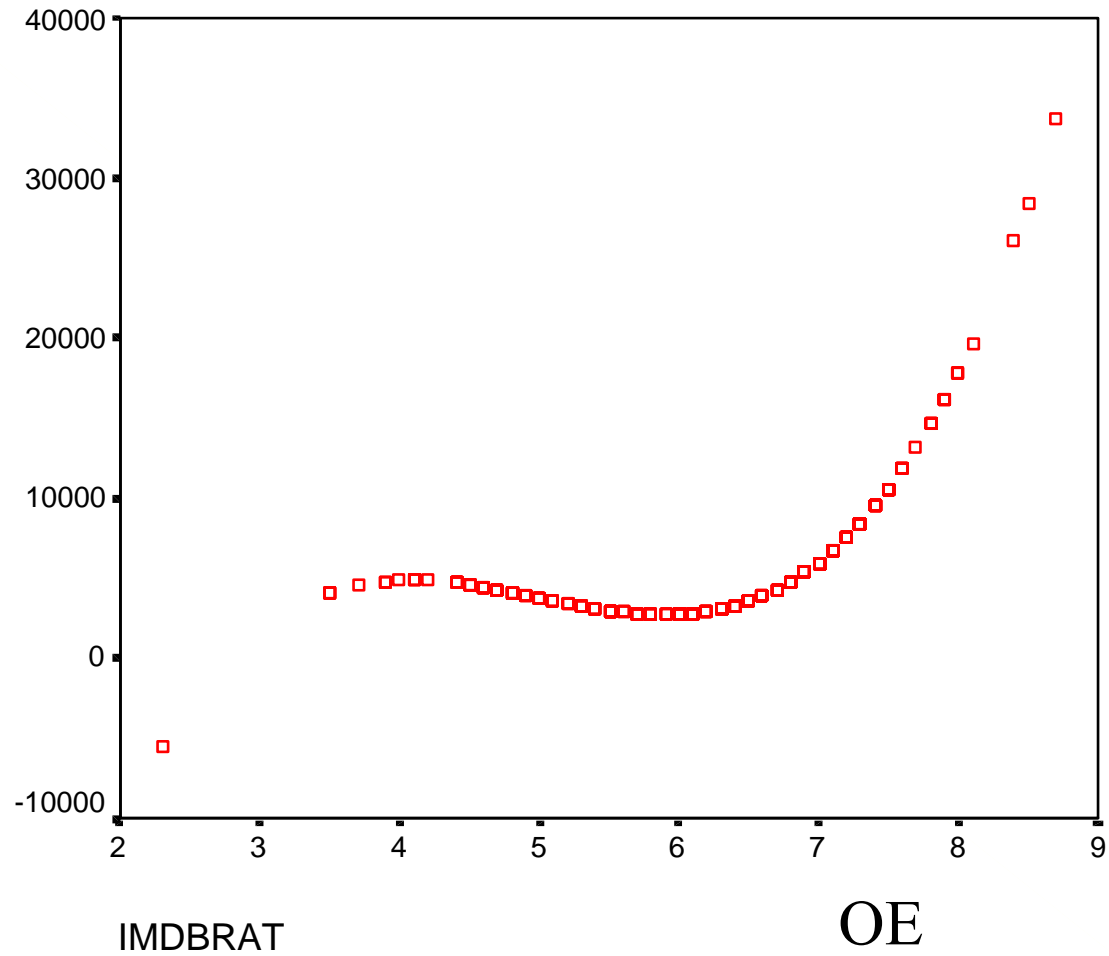
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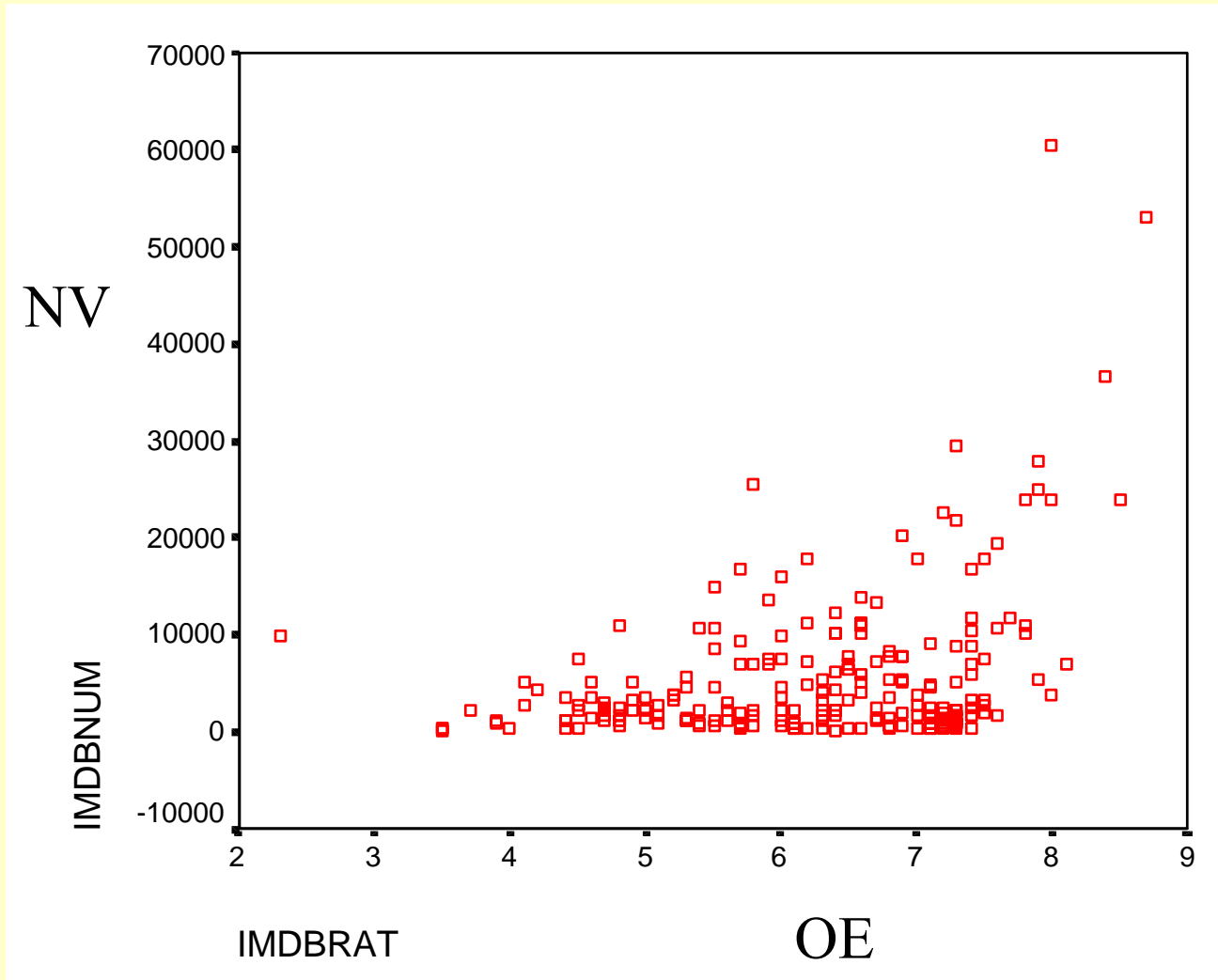
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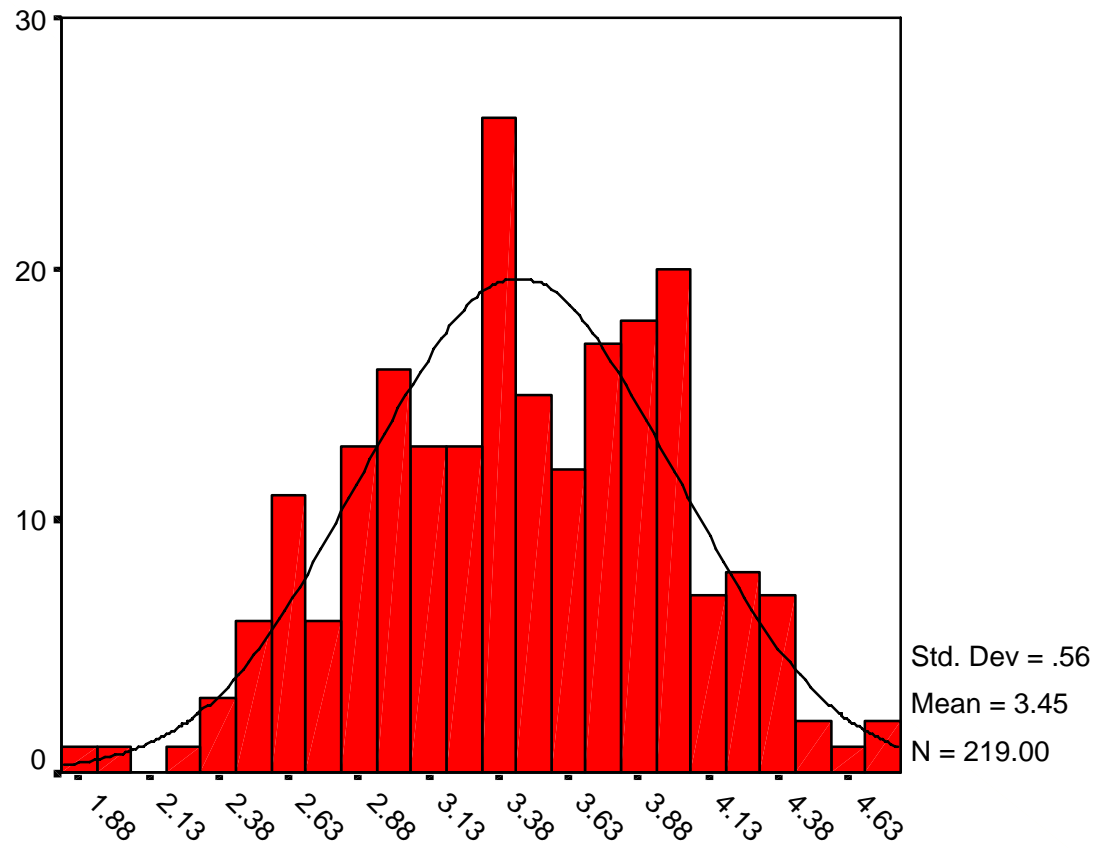
Best-
Fitting
Cubic
Function
Explaining
NV



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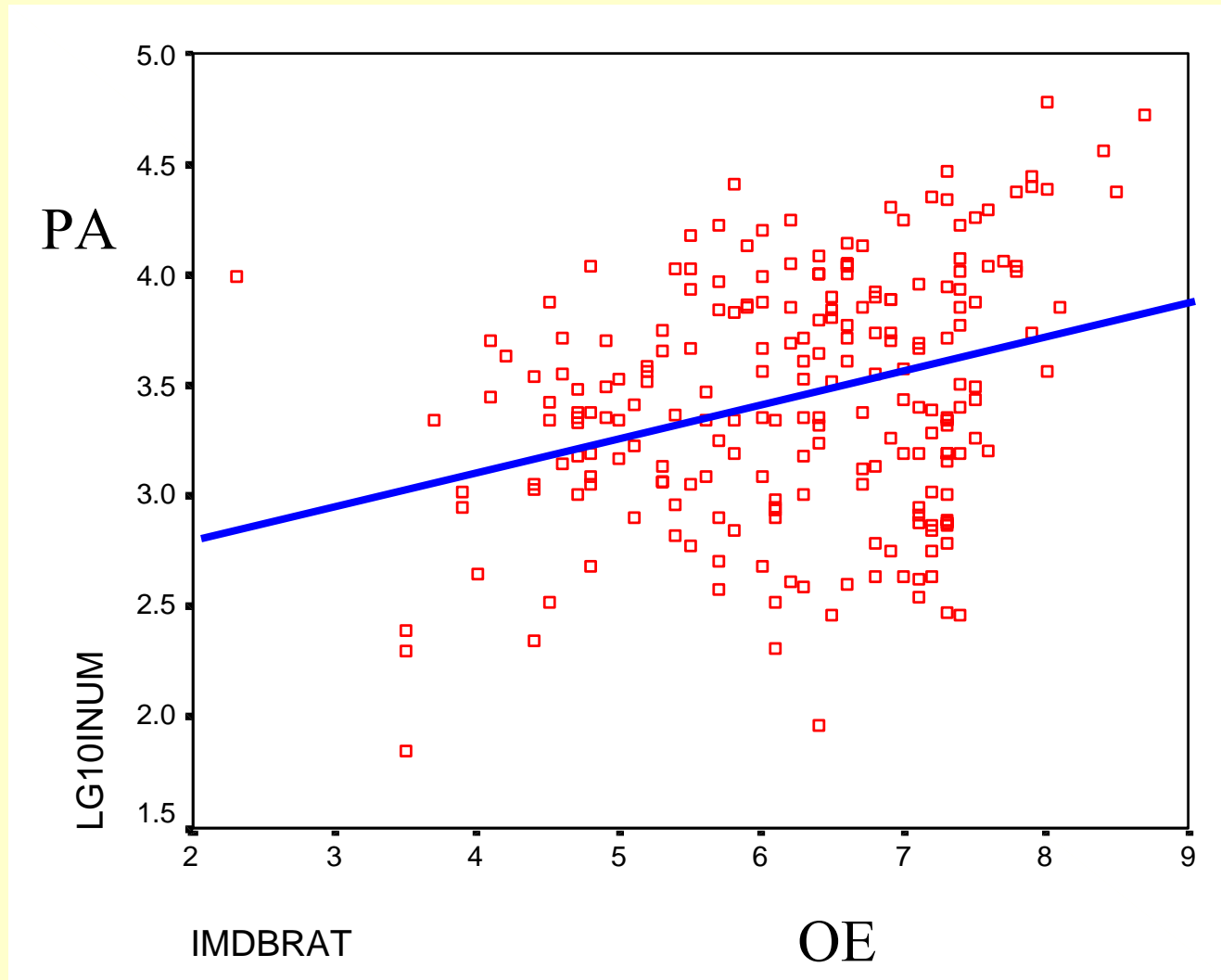


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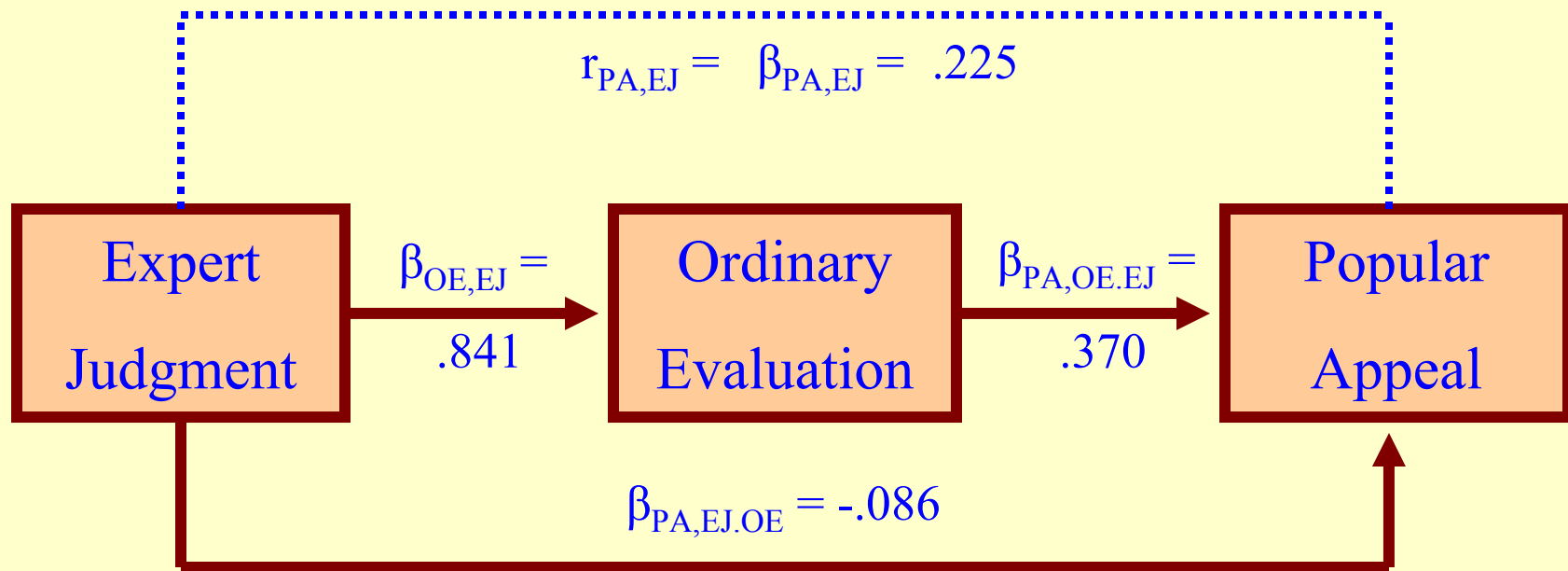


$$PA = \text{Log}_{10}(NV)$$

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- so ... again
 - aspects of “good taste”: .841 and .370
 - combine to produce an overall relationship showing “little taste”:
 $r = .225 = .841 \times .370 - .086$... So that ... $r^2 = .051$

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- ***But*** ... the findings just reported for motion pictures suffer from some potential ***methodological weaknesses***
 - (1) ***time sequence*** of measuring the relevant variables does ***not*** necessarily reflect the theoretically correct order of events
 - EJ ***after*** OE & PA
 - OE ***simultaneously*** with PA
 - (2) audience measures ***not*** obtained ***independently***
 - OE and PA measured on ***same people***
 - possibility of a ***methodological artifact***
 - (3) EJ, OE, &/or PA might be ***biased*** by various ***contaminating market(ing)-related influences***
 - if marketing budgets influence EJ-OE-&/or-PA
 - if EJ anticipates PA or market success
 - if market success drives OE &/or PA

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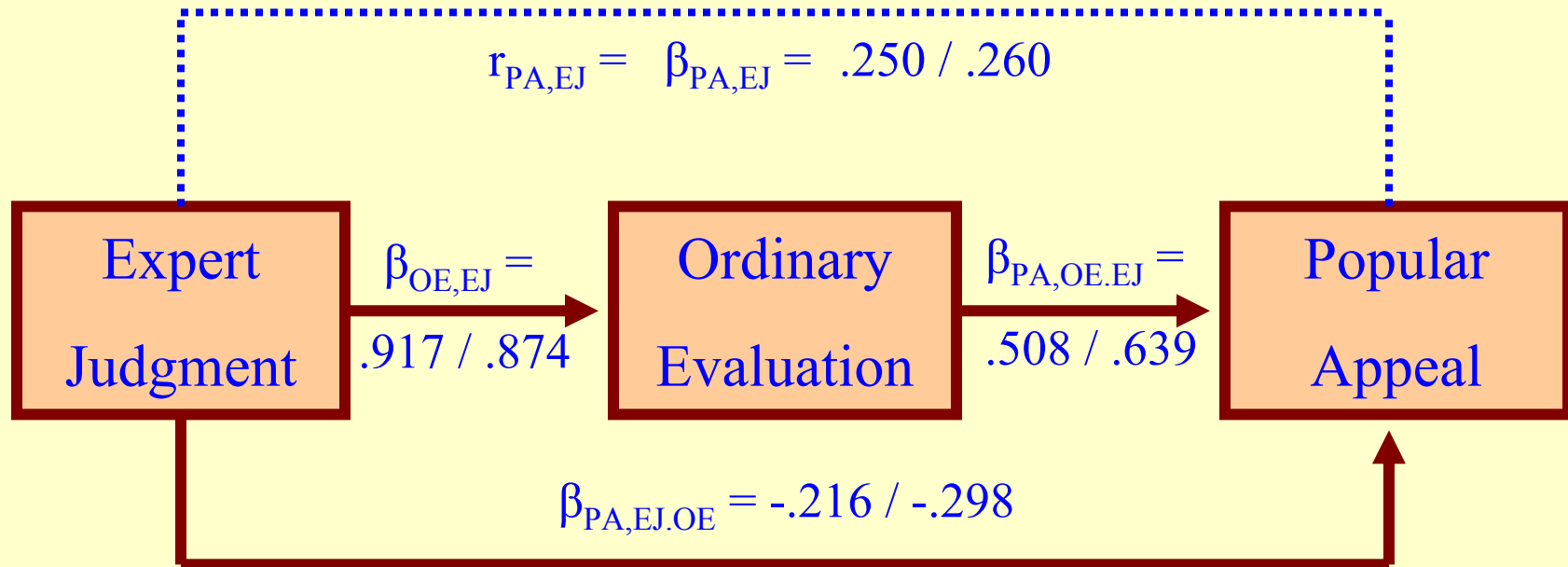
- *So ...* To address these *three problems*, Michela Addis and I have conducted *two additional studies* using completely *new data* for films from *2000 and 2003*
 - (1) *time sequence*: we now measure
 - *EJ* at release via *average reviewer ratings* on rottentomatoes.com
 - *OE & PA* in *successive two-/one-year periods* (2000/2003)
 - (2) *independence*:
 - *OE* and *PA* measured on
 - *different groups of people*
 - (3) *contaminating market(ing)-related influences*
 - *Index of Market Success* (Opening Screens + domestic Box Office + Video Rentals)
 - now *partialled out* of *EJ-OE-&-PA* by working with *residuals* (REJ, ROE, & RPA)

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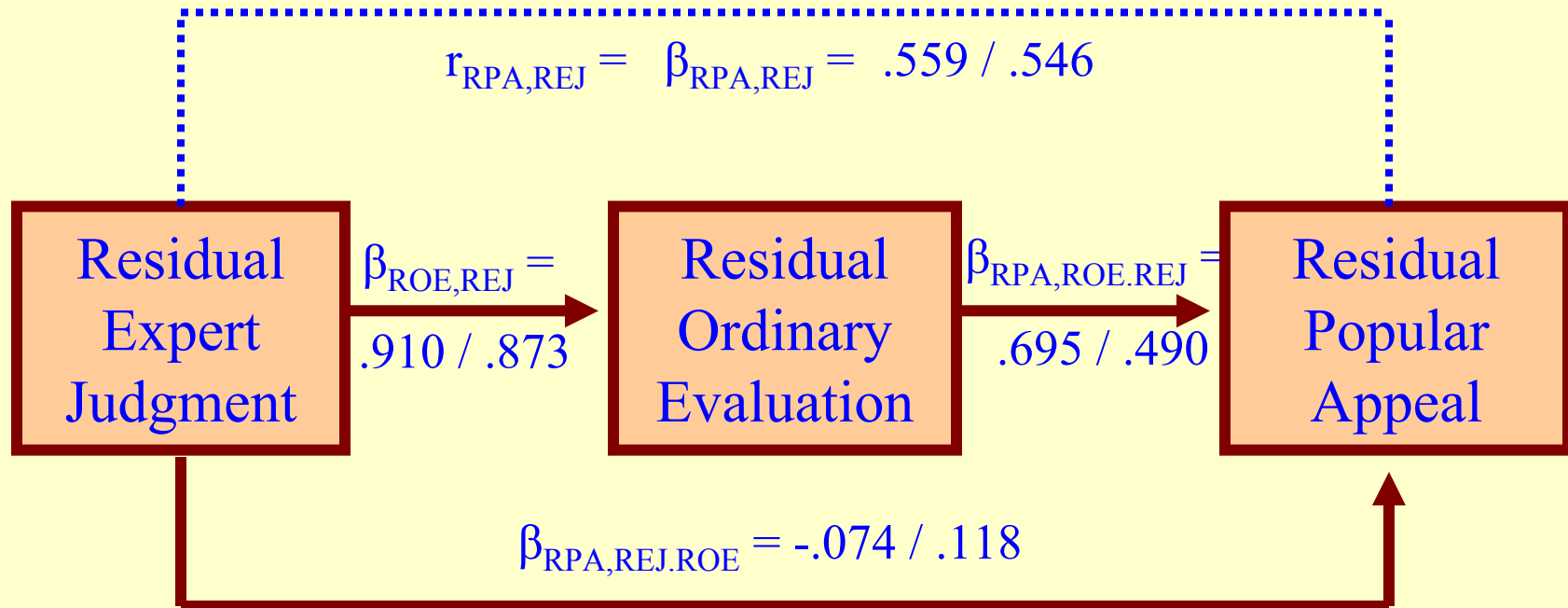
- *Studies 1/2* produce extremely *similar results*
 - which I'll *discuss together*
 - keeping in mind that they show *strong reliability* and *convergent validity* over a four-year period (2000-2003)
- *Overall*
 - (A) in terms of *replication*
 - working with the *improved measures* of EJ, OE, & PA
 - the results for Studies 1/2 support the usual "*little taste*" *phenomenon*
 - (B) in terms of *new insights*
 - when *controlling* for market(ing)-related influences by *partialing* Market Success (MS) from EJ, OE, & PA
 - the residual measures REJ, ROE, & RPA support a *hitherto undetected finding* in favor of "*good taste*"

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- (A) *replication* via *improved measures* of the usual “*little taste*” phenomenon consistent with *mediation* via aspects of “*good taste*”
 - for 2000, $r = .250 = .917 \times .508 - .216 \dots r^2 = .0625$
 - for 2003, $r = .260 = .874 \times .639 - .298 \dots r^2 = .0676$

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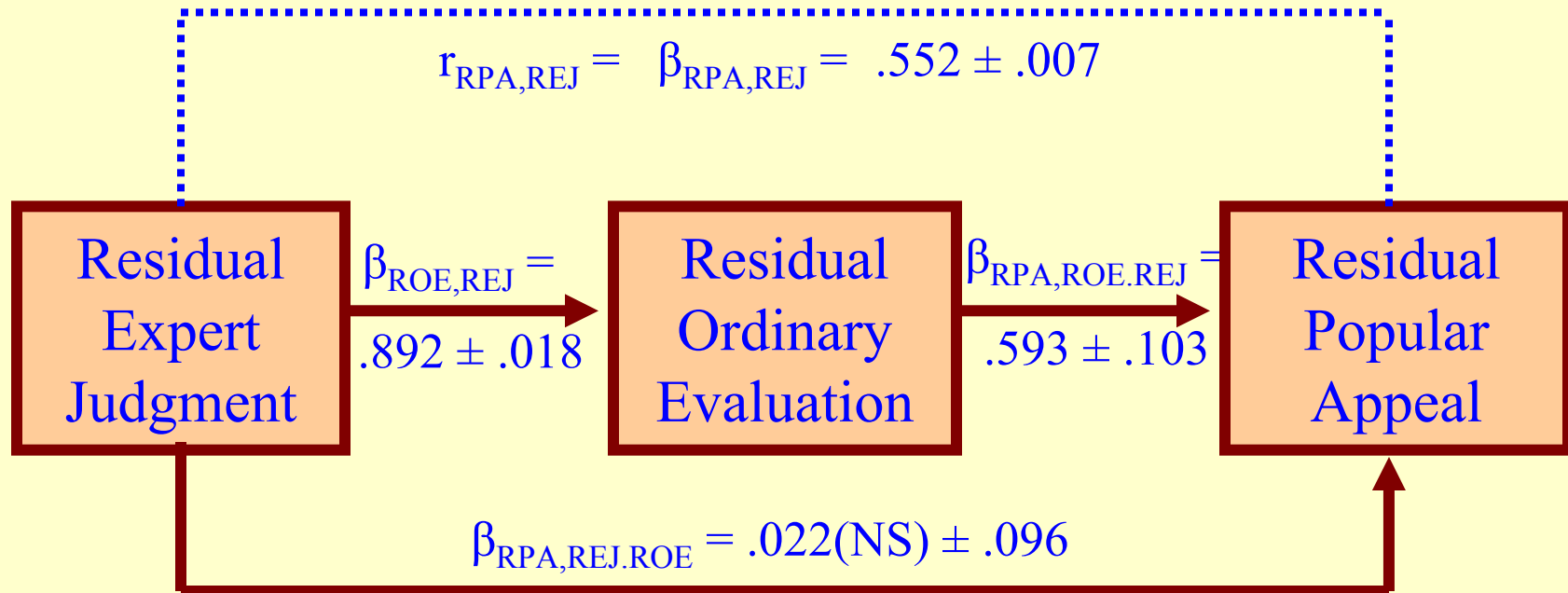
- (B) *new insights* when *controlling* for Market Success by *partialing* MS from EJ-OE-&-PA to derive *residuals REJ-ROE-&-RPA*
 - for 2000, $r = .559 = .910 \times .695 - .074 \dots r^2 = .312$
 - for 2003, $r = .546 = .873 \times .490 + .118 \dots r^2 = .298$

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- (B) *Summary* of New Insights – *Part B*
 - *Combining* data from *both studies*
 - When *controlling* for market(ing)-related influences by *partialing* Market Success (MS) from EJ-OE-&-PA to derive *residuals REJ-ROE-&-RPA*
 - Get
 - *Overall* effects
 - *Strong*
 - *Statistically significant*
 - But *no significant differences* between the *two studies*

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- (B) *new insights* when *controlling* for Market Success by *partialing* MS from EJ-OE-&-PA to derive *residuals REJ-ROE-&-RPA*
 - for *both studies* combined
 - any differences *between* studies are *not* significant
 - *overall*: $r = .552 = .892 \times .593 + .022 \dots r^2 = .300$

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- *Bottom line*
 - when using *new* and *improved* measures
 - *sequential* and *independent* measures of EJ, OE, and PA
 - *controlling* for the potential contaminating effects of *market(ing)-related influences*
 - we replicate the “*little taste*” *phenomenon* due to a *mediated relationship* combining *aspects of “good taste”*
 - $r_{PA,EJ} \approx .250 \approx .90 \times .55 - .25$
 - $r^2 \approx .0625$
 - *but* – when controlling for MS – we also uncover an *overall phenomenon of “good taste”* far *greater* than hitherto suspected
 - $r_{RPA,REJ} \approx .55 \approx .90 \times .60$
 - $r^2 \approx .30$

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- *Put differently*
 - when assessed by means of *purified measures* and *refined methods*
 - the “*good taste*” of ordinary consumers (r^2) turns out to be
 - roughly *five times* what we *formerly thought*
 - $r^2_{RPA,REJ} / r^2_{PA,EJ} = .30 / .0625 = 4.8$
 - *so*, by this logic, it appears that
 - *contrary* to previous studies
 - ordinary non-expert consumers *do* have “*good taste*”



THE



END