



“Moral Relevance of Music”  
Long & Eveland

# **The Political and Moral Relevance of Popular Music: Matching Worldviews with Lyrical Content**

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# What’s going on with music?

- Popular genres of music frequently have ideologically similar fanbases (Bryson, 1996)
  - Country music = conservative
  - Rap, hip hop = liberal?
- Previous assessments have found very little political content in popular genres, but rather expressions of identity and values (Buckley, 1979; Martinez, 1997; Rose, 1991; Van Sickel, 2005)
- Some experimental evidence for political and identity effects of music exposure (LaMarre, Knobloch-Westerwick, & Hoplamazian, 2012; Zillmann, Aust, et al., 1995)



“Moral Relevance of Music”  
Cleveland

Music is too r

**CNN** politics

# Kanye West declares 2020 presidential bid at VMAs



By **Deena Zaru**, CNN

Updated 11:47 PM ET, Sat September 5, 2015



REVIEWS BY JENNIFER HARRIS FOR CNN



...er in the near



# Moral Foundations Theory

- Moral judgments occur within a finite set of mental modules, AKA “foundations”
- Foundations
  - Care / Harm
  - Fairness / Cheating
  - Loyalty / Betrayal
  - Authority / Subversion
  - Purity / Degradation
- Research suggests link between moral foundations content in entertainment and preferences or enjoyment (Tamborini, 2011)



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## Care/harm





# Fairness/cheating





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# Authority/subversion





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## Loyalty/betrayal





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Purity/degradation

**FLIES SPREAD**  
**DISEASES**  
**SO KEEP YOURS**  
**ZIIPPED.**

COOLVIRGINITY.COM





# Moral sentiments and progressivism

## Individualizing

- Care/harm
- Fairness/cheating

## Binding

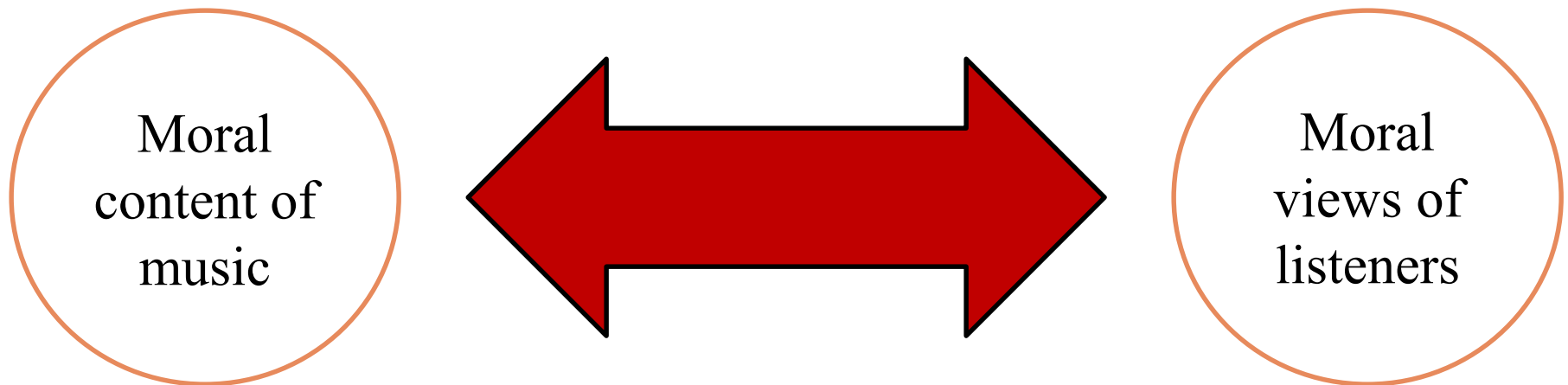
- Authority/subversion
- Loyalty/betrayal
- Purity/degradation

The more that **individualizing** foundations are prioritized above **binding** foundations, the more *progressive* the person/group/society is.



## Goals of the Study

- Describe cross-genre variations in Moral Foundations in music lyrics
- Link lyrics in preferred genres to individual differences in moral foundations
- No specific causal direction specified





## Method: Content Analysis

- Automated scraping of music lyrics from Billboard songs and albums charts (2010-2015)
  - 37,209 song lyrics (12.7 million words) analyzed across 10 genres
- Automated content analysis using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC)
  - Moral Foundations Dictionary

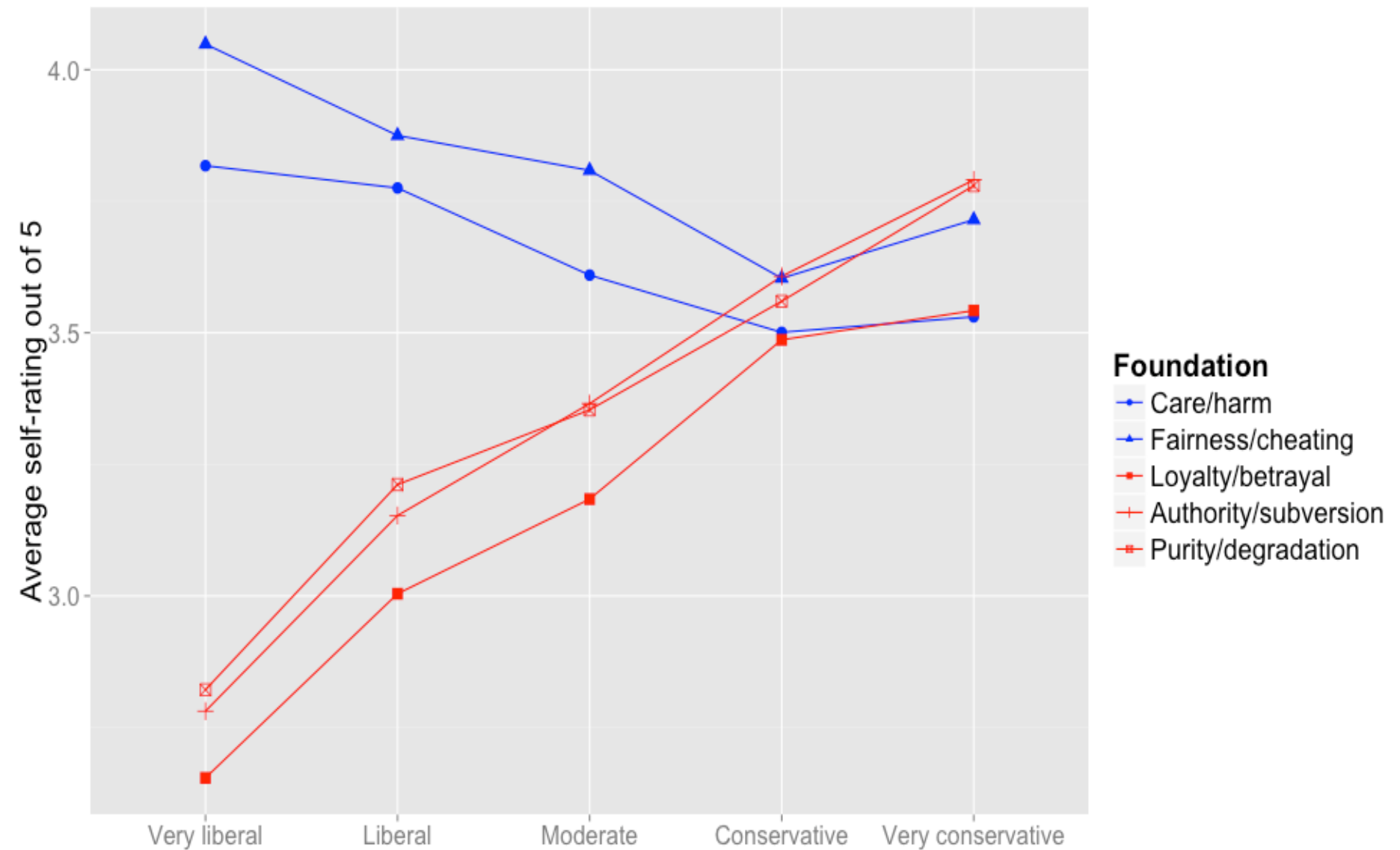


## Method: Survey

- Nationally representative online survey (YouGov) with Black oversample
  - N = 1000
  - Preferences and exposure to 13 genres of music
  - 20-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire

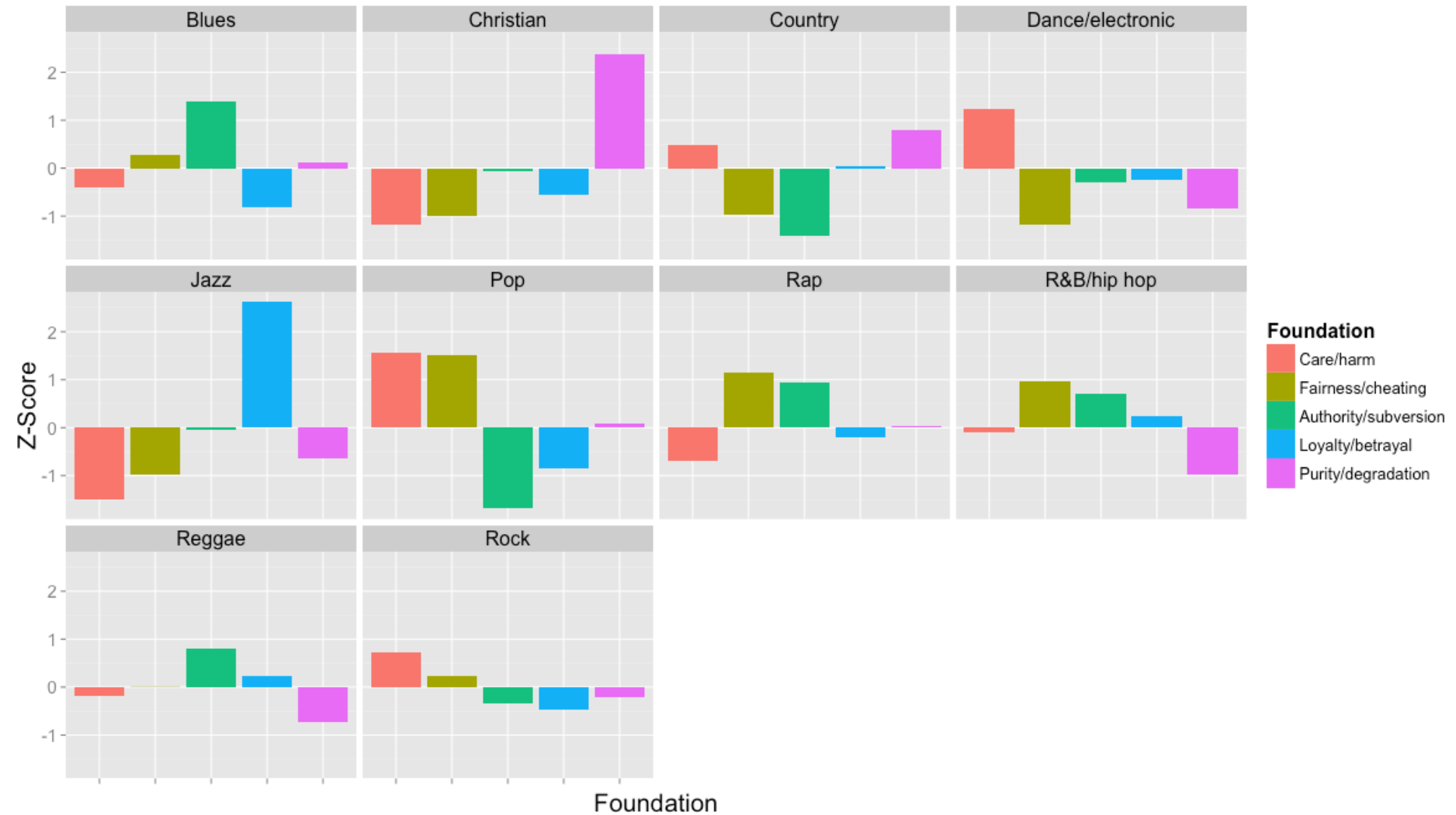


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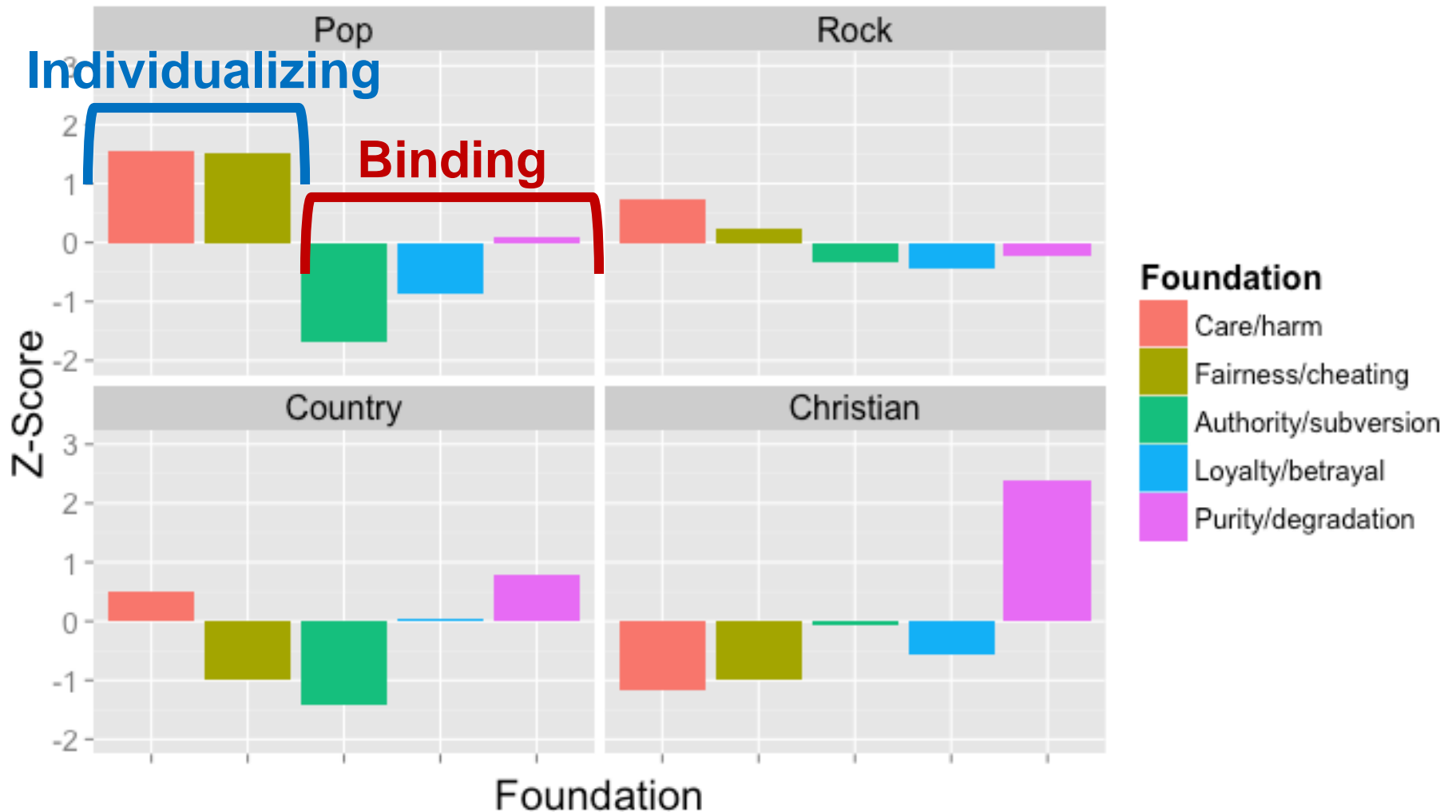


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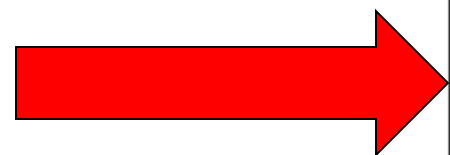




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Predicting  
Moral  
Progressivism

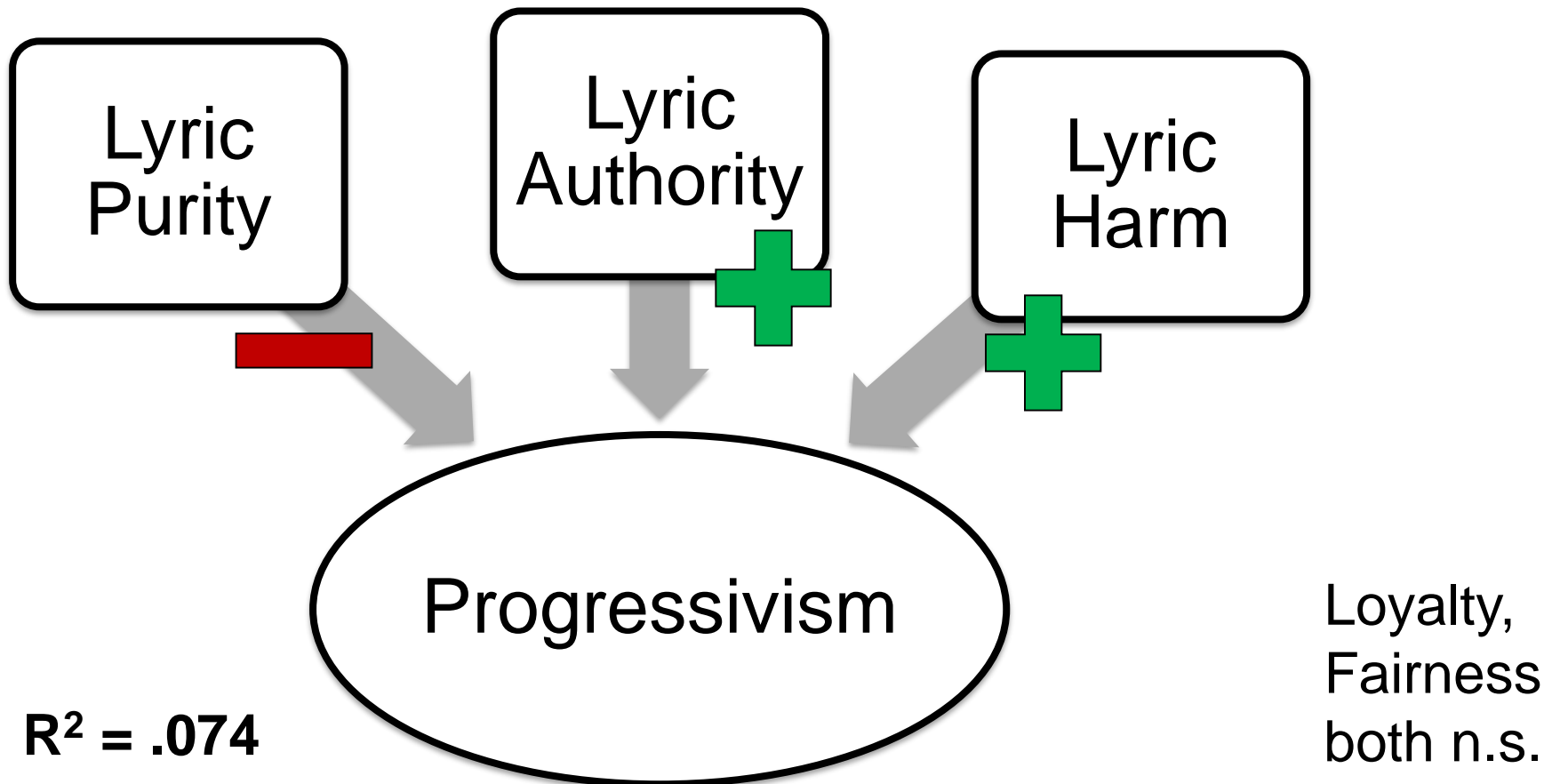
	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Controls</i>		
Gender (Male)		.10 (.05)#
Age		.00 (.00)
Education		.05 (.01)*
Race (Black)		-.22 (.07)*
Religion (Christian)		-.29 (.05)*
<i>Political beliefs</i>		
Ideology (Conservative)		-.27 (.02)*
<i>Weighted Lyrics</i>		
Care / Harm	.20 (.03)*	.10 (.09)
Fairness / Cheating	-.05 (.10)	-.10 (.10)
Loyalty / Betrayal	.02 (.09)	-.04 (.09)
Authority / Subversion	.27 (.12)*	.30 (.12)*
Purity / Degradation	-.50 (.07)*	-.26 (.07)*
Model R <sup>2</sup>	0.074*	0.282*
N	927	818





Predicting  
Moral  
Progressivism

## Model 1





Predicting  
Moral  
Progressivism

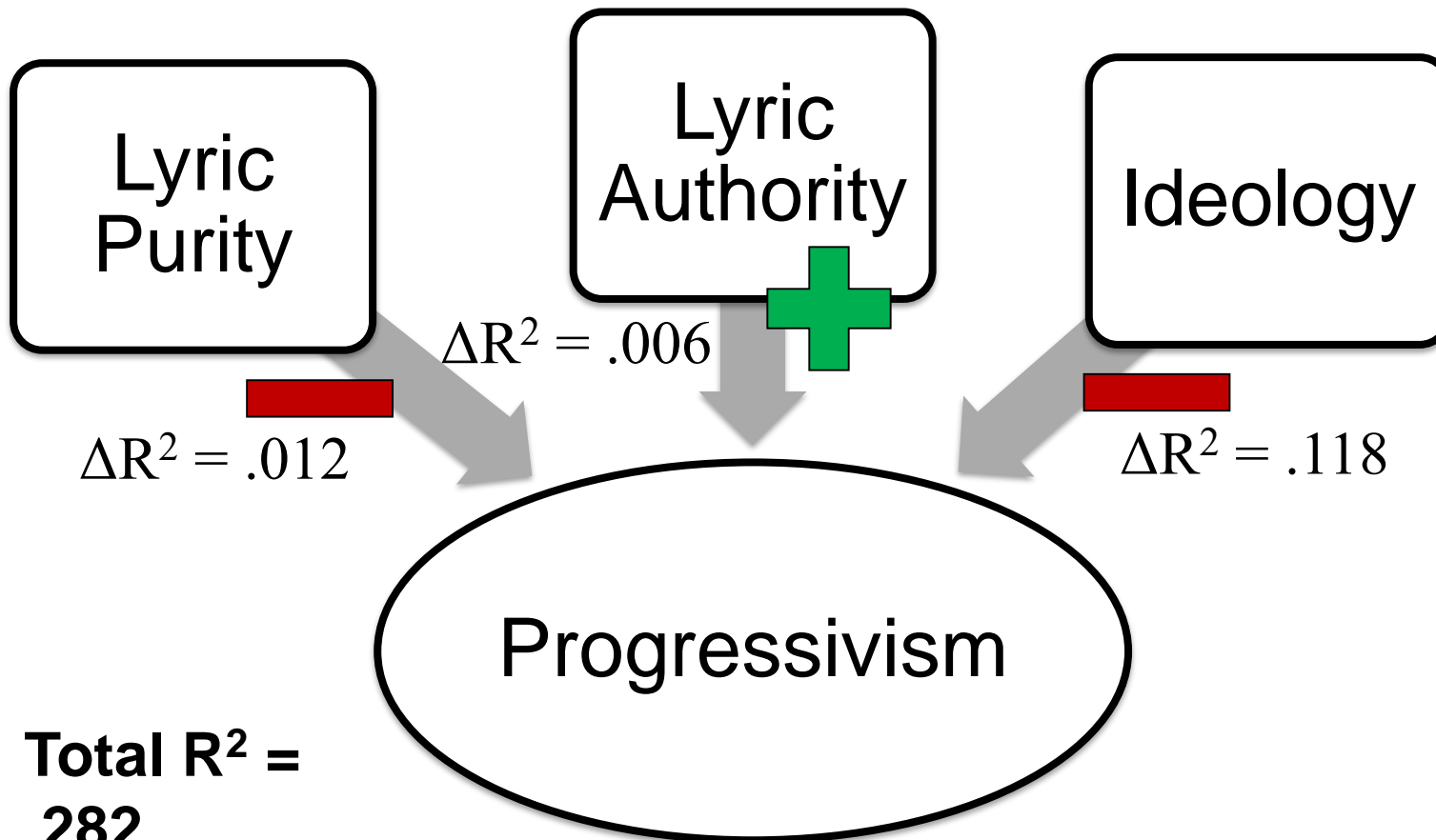
## Model 2

Controls:

- Gender#
- Age
- Religion\*
- Race\*
- Education\*

**Control  $R^2 = .123$**

Lyrics:  
Harm,  
Loyalty,  
Fairness  
both n.s.





## Conclusions of the Study

- Music lyrics vary across genres with regard to their focus on various moral foundations
  - These variations are generally consistent with expectations
- Preferences and exposure to lyrics emphasizing purity/degradation are linked with moral progressivism
  - This effect remains despite meaningful statistical controls
- Some findings appear to contradict expectations