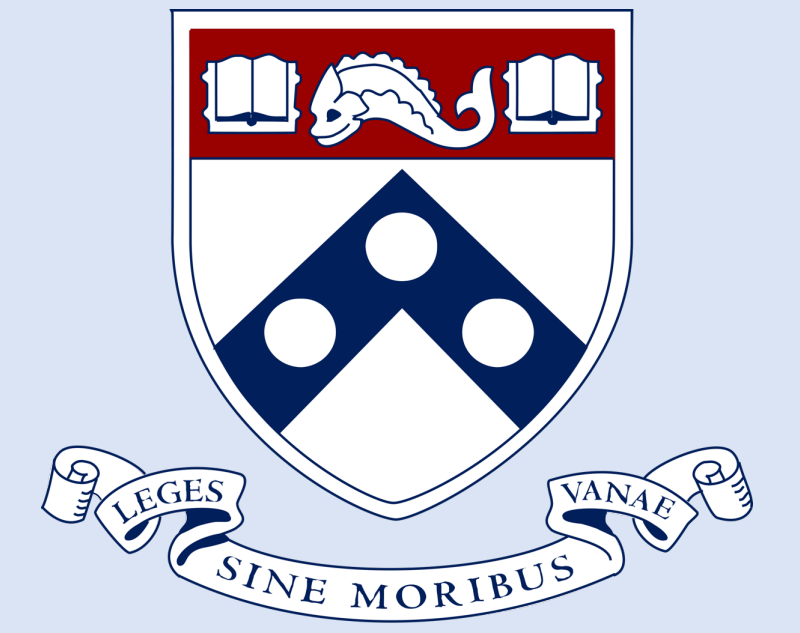


When Are Cherished Memories Contaminated?

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BACKGROUND

With an unprecedented success of *The Cosby Show*, Bill Cosby mesmerized the nation with his wit and humor. However, in 2014, a series of highly publicized accusations of sexual assault left the nation with a strenuous task – reckoning with the memory of having once loved Cosby and his show. Similarly, Ray Charles, who was beloved as the “Brother Ray”, turned out to be an irresponsible and immoral father. Upon such revelations of negative information, how do consumers maintain or contaminate their memories of a cherished past?

Specifically, we examine the effect of discovering negative information about an artist on (1) **consumers’ memories of**, and (2) their **contemporary attitudes towards the artist and the artist’s creation**.

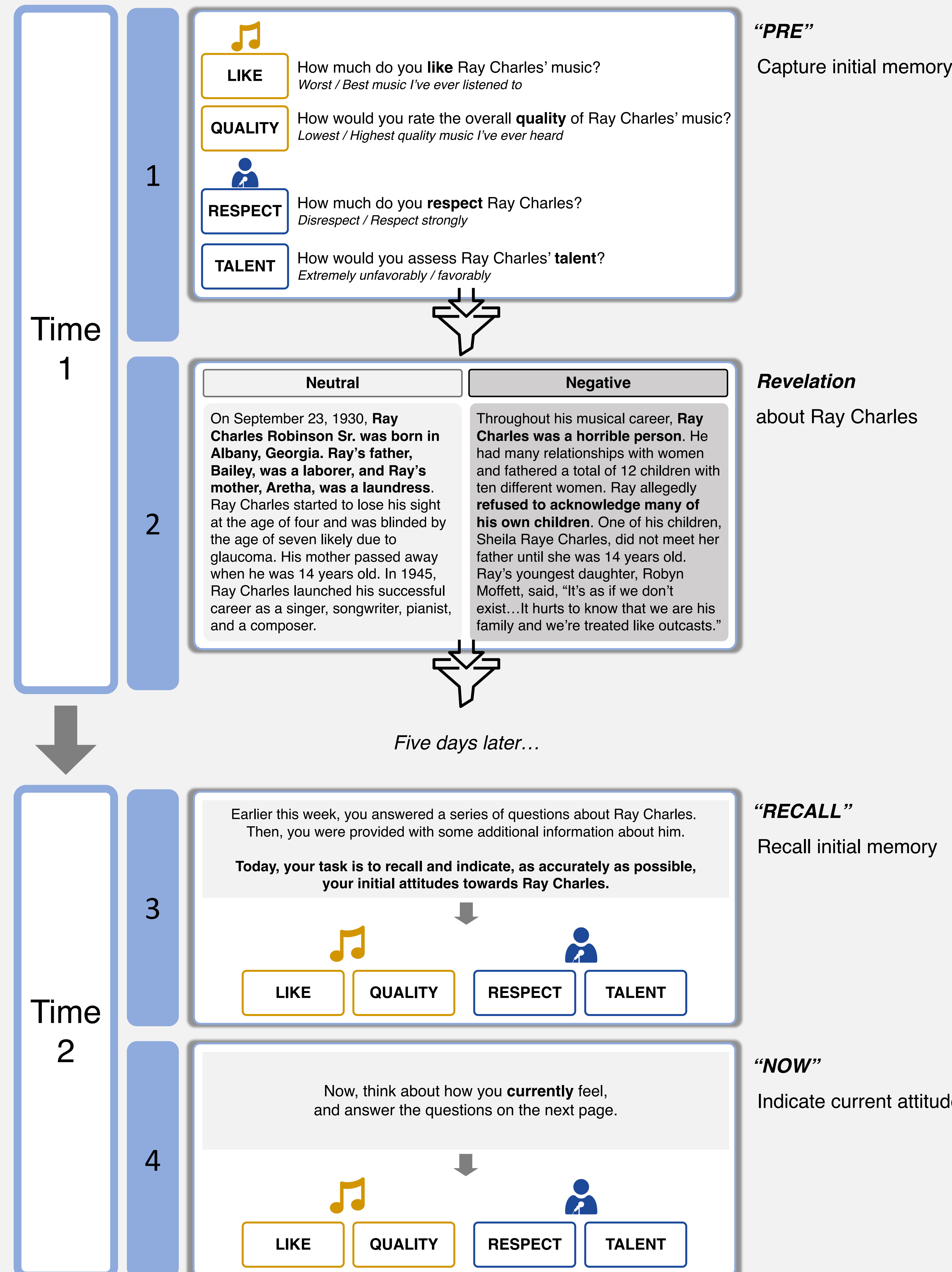
OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

We find evidence for **selective memory contamination**, where consumers accurately recall the memory of the art while failing to recall the positive memory of the artist. Despite the selective contamination of art and the artist in memory, consumers **uniformly tarnish their current judgements** about the art and the artist. Such uniform negative shifts in contemporary attitudes diverge from patterns that can be described by moral decoupling¹, moral disengagement², and moral rationalization³.

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

Study	Recruited Sample	Artist & Art	PRE	RECALL	NOW
1	1203	Unknown Painter & Painting	✓	✓	✓
2	1205		private reflection	✓	✓
3	1202	Ray Charles & Music	✓	✓	✓
4	1203		financial incentives	✓	✓
5	2001	John Lennon & Music	✓	between-subjects	between-subjects

STUDY 3: DESIGN



STUDY 3: RESULTS

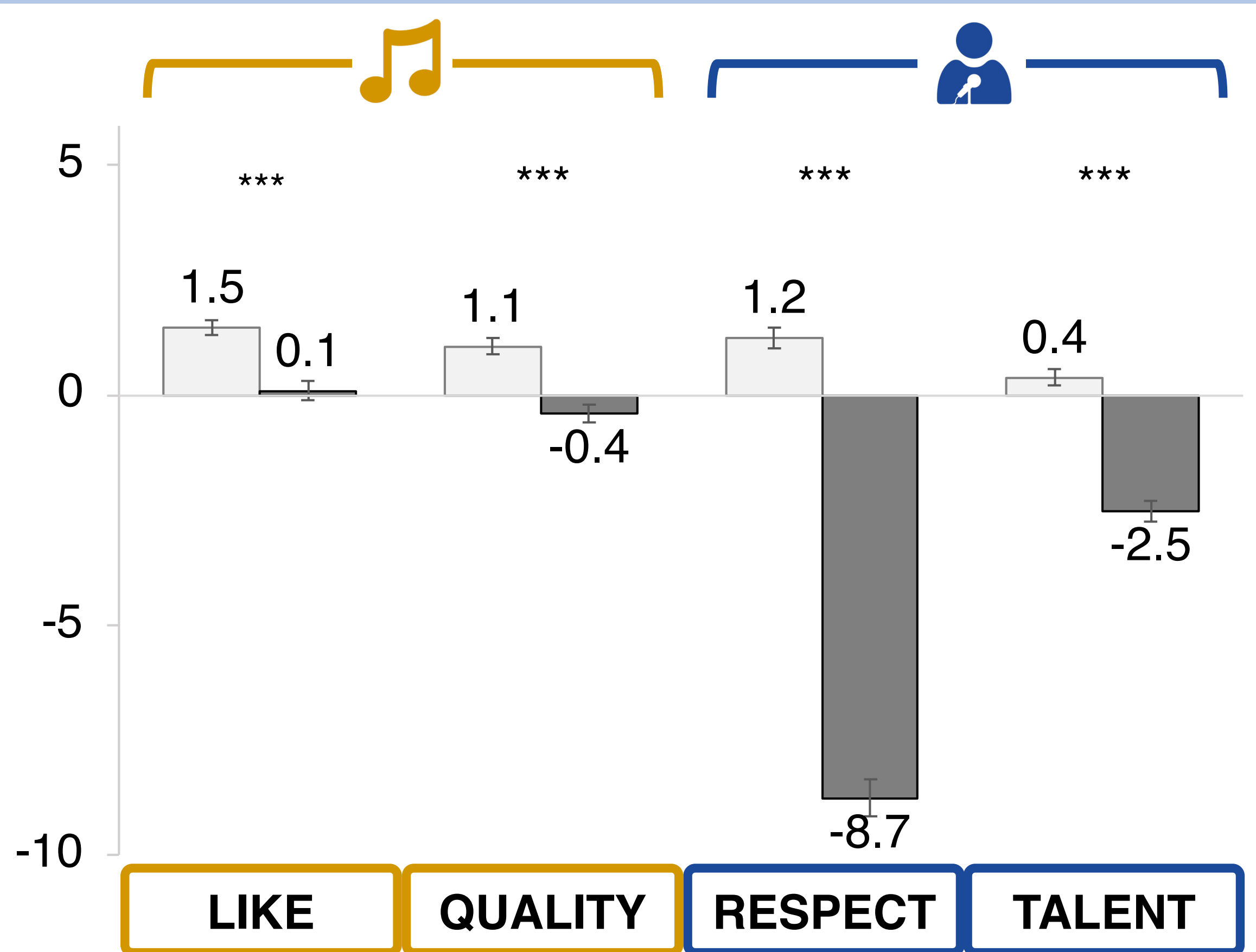
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Consumers recall that they used to like Ray Charles’ music and used to consider it high quality. However, they cannot preserve having once held cherished memories of Ray Charles himself.
- Despite the partitioning of art and artist in memory, consumers uniformly taint their contemporary judgments towards Ray Charles’ music, as well as Ray Charles himself.

Changes in Memory (RECALL subtracted by PRE)



Shifts in Current Attitudes (NOW subtracted by PRE)



CONCLUSION

Across five studies, we find that consumers, on average, engage in selective memory contamination, accurately recalling their memories of the art while negatively tainting the memory of the artist. In contrast to such partitioning of art and artist in memory, consumers’ current attitudes about the art and the artist are both negatively shifted in the face of novel negative information.

[1] Bhattacharjee, Amit, Jonathan Z. Berman, and Americus Reed (2013), “Tip of the Hat, Wag of the Finger: How Moral Decoupling Enables Consumers to Admire and Admonish,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(6), 1167–84. [2] Shu, Lisa L., Francesca Gino, and Max H. Bazerman (2011), “Dishonest Deed, Clear Conscience: When Cheating Leads to Moral Disengagement and Motivated Forgetting,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(3), 330–49. [3] Bandura, A. (1999), “Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3(3), 193–209.