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Does Creative Thought Really Matter? The Impact of Arts Participation on Civic Engagement

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**Does Creative Thought Really Matter? The Impact of Arts Participation on Civic
Engagement***

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**Does Creative Thought Really Matter? The Impact of Arts Participation on Civic
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ABSTRACT

Art has been crucial in fostering individual and community identities, but does arts participation increase levels of civic engagement? I propose that individuals who attend performances and art exhibits participate in more public activities and spend more social evenings with neighbors per year. To test these hypotheses, I analyze 438 cases from the 2016 General Social Survey (GSS). Findings provide partial support for my hypotheses. Regression results reveal that respondents who attended a performance or art exhibit in the last 12 months participated in significantly more public activities. However, there is not a statistically significant relationship between performance and art exhibit attendance with sociability with neighbors. Among control variables, education, family income, and age are significant predictors of participation in public activities. Family income is the only significant predictor of sociability with neighbors. Through a social capital approach, these results suggest that performances and art exhibits are associational activities that strengthen community ties, which increases an individual's likelihood of voting and socializing with neighbors, friends, and others in public spaces like bars. Future researchers should utilize more specific measures of community involvement and civic engagement to continue studying the relationship between arts participation and civic engagement.

Does Creative Thought Really Matter? The Impact of Arts Participation on Civic Engagement

The arts have always encouraged creative expression, but over the past few years I have questioned how the arts influence community involvement. There are many instances when art has had a lasting impact on me, but I vividly remember sitting in the *A More Perfect Union* exhibit in the Tang Teaching Museum right as Donald Trump won the presidential election. This exhibit included Mel Ziegler's *Flag Exchange*, which was a collection of weathered American flags that Ziegler collected while traveling across all 50 states. This space equated the Tang Teaching Museum to a town hall, bringing together members of the Saratoga community as well as the larger capital region to think critically about the state of the union. By attending these events up until the day of the election, I felt immersed in the political process and the community fostered by the museum. Upon discovering the election results, I processed a series of opinions and emotions, but most specifically wondered: why did millions of Americans not come out to vote on election day?

Still processing the election results and the political aftermath three years later, I am interested in if arts participation increases levels of civic engagement. With voting accessibility and political apathy aside, I have been searching for a driving force that connects individuals to both their local and national communities. Over the summer while planning free concerts and other public programs at the Skirball Cultural Center, I saw how arts programming fosters a strong sense of community. Attendees identified with social and political issues expressed through the art, identified with cultural identities showcased, and bonded with other attendees. Not only does art allow for creative expression, but it can also act as a force of social change.

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However, arts resources and education are unequally distributed across communities and cultural capital perpetuates the cycle of wealthier individuals consuming more art. This proves problematic, especially when lower income communities are becoming distanced from art resources that could serve as key tools for creative and cultural expression. While acknowledging these inequalities, I aim to uncover the benefits once individuals are exposed to the arts.

Many sociologists have focused on the sociology of art, which draws from a cultural production approach to analyze both the production and interpretation of art (Born 2010; Fuente 2010, Hanquinet 2013; Hanquinet, Roose, and Savage 2013; Wohl 2015). Other scholars propose that arts participation can strengthen individual identities, allow for more group identification, and promote civic dialogue (Köttig 2009; Langdrige, Gabb and Lawson 2019; Fine 2013, DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly 2015; Kelaher et al. 2014; Martiniello 2015; Martiniello 2018). Other sociologists have studied the barriers to arts participation and the changing relationship of cultural capital and arts participation (Banks 2010; Christin 2012; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Khan 2013; Reeves 2015; Yusek, Dumais, and Kamo 2019). Alternatively, previous literature has explored the predictors of civic engagement such as education and voluntarism (Morimoto and Friedland 2013; Putnam 2000; Walker 2008; Wuthnow 2002). While synthesizing these previous studies, I will draw attention to the intersection between the arts and civic engagement. I aim to uncover a positive and statistically significant relationship between arts participation and civic engagement, which hopefully could bring awareness to the necessity for equal access to the arts.

To address the effects of arts participation on civic engagement, I propose two hypotheses. Firstly, I hypothesize that respondents who went to a live music, theater, or dance

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performance or an art exhibit in the past 12 months participate in more public activities.

Secondly, I hypothesize that respondents who went to a live music, theater, or dance performance or an art exhibit in the past 12 months spend more social evenings with someone who lives in their neighborhood.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though many other disciplines, nonprofit organizations, and the National Endowment for the Arts have specifically studied the relationship between the arts participation and civic engagement, there has been very little research conducted through a sociological lens. Cultural sociologists have focused on studying art while political sociologists have focused on studying civic engagement, but I aim to bridge the gap between the two. First, I will address the sociology of art, identity and identification in art, barriers to arts participation, and the decline in cultural capital and the arts. Then, I will analyze what political sociologists have found to be the most powerful predictors of civic engagement.

Sociology of Art

Within cultural sociology, a substantial amount of previous literature is dedicated to the sociology of art and the process of cultural production. This approach implies that art production is predetermined by the artist's habitus (Born 2010). These studies rely on Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical rationale to explain how the artist's habitus reflects their own social upbringings. This approach also notes how social upbringings and education establish an individual's cultural practices such as attending an art exhibit or performance. However, other scholars have challenged Bourdieu's rationale by suggesting that the art object is not predetermined and inherently more complex.

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Since other scholars have criticized Bourdieu's approach as an incomplete explanation of the cultural production of art, many theorists have proposed a "new sociology of art," which takes a more comprehensive approach. Fuente (2010) argued that the sociology of art should draw more of its foundations from material culture studies in order to take a more subjective approach. This newer approach better applies to art exhibit and performance attendance by connecting the production of the art object itself to the attendee's own subjectification and materialization of the art. Theorists like Hanquinet (2013:791) have even suggested a new sociology of profiles to classify "cultural, creative and leisure preferences and activities, towards various forms of art." This approach draws from Bourdieu's approach, but addresses more cultural factors instead of assuming that habitus and cultural capital alone predetermine arts production and participation (Hanquinet, Roose, and Savage 2013).

Another recent addition to the sociology of art is the community aspect of aesthetic judgement and art production. Both Kelaher et al. (2014) and Wohl (2015) noted how communication with others while viewing or producing art can create a stronger sense of community identification. When viewing art with others, individuals assess if others have good or bad taste. Through these interactions, people can find validity through shared opinions and a stronger sense of belonging in their communities (Wohl 2015). This portion of the sociology of art is especially important for my research question because if people participate in the arts, they are more likely to interact with neighbors, friends, and other people in their communities based on the foundation of shared aesthetic taste.

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Identity and Identification in Art

While the sociology of art takes more of a theoretical approach, there is an entire portion of previous literature that takes a more personal approach to study the relationship between art, identity and identification. Firstly, individuals are more likely to connect to the art if it reminds them of their childhood experiences, present self, or possible future self (Langdrige, Gabb and Lawson 2019:594). When creating or participating in art, individuals can both express and strengthen their own identities. Fine (2013) notes how within self-taught art, “the authenticity of the artist justifies the authenticity of the artwork” and “self-taught art is a form of identity art in which the characteristics of the creators matter as much as the characteristics of the work” (Fine 2013:175-6). Through authenticity, artists can create work that encapsulates their own identities, which others can later identify with. Across previous literature, two of the most common themes within identity and identification include cultural identities that are expressed through art and civic dialogue created through art.

Cultural identity. Previous literature has specifically studied the importance of art in identities and identification in marginalized groups. Langdrige et al. (2019:459) identified how diversity and representativeness in art is directly linked to identification, which illuminates how the public is more likely to identify with art based on the accessibility to relatable art in their communities and the media. In the media, immigrant artists promote the possibility of “expressive entrepreneurship,” which involves gaining revenue and notoriety through the arts (DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly 2015:1242). With this notion of expressive entrepreneurship, artists encourage their fans to also pursue creative efforts. Artists also can draw from music and rhythms from their birth countries and “finds authenticity in the fusion of an immigrant past and

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a claim to the American Dream” (DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly 2015:1242). Immigrants can also support themselves through the process of adjusting to a new country by using art to maintain their national and cultural identities (Köttig 2009).

Cultural identities can also even mobilize civic engagement through the arts. For example, Martiniello (2014) noted the role that “Latino artists played in Barack Obama’s campaign by using different Latino music genres (from mariachi music to corrido, salsa and reggaeton) to attract specific subsections of the Latino electorate” (Martiniello 2014:1233). Since music is a significant part of cultural identity, it can even promote political support for a candidate or political participation in general.

Civic dialogue. With such a close relationship with identity, the arts have been a platform for civic dialogue within communities. Nonprofit arts organizations have been essential forces in building communities and for sparking conversations around social issues. For example, Kelahe et al. (2014) focused on VicHealth’s Community Arts Development Scheme, which funded three community arts organizations to work with people from marginalized or disadvantaged communities to illuminate how the arts can strengthen individual and community identities and ultimately create civic dialogue. With access to arts organizations, participants are encouraged to share their work with a larger audience and continue to be engaged with their communities. Martiniello (2018) found that collaboration on artistic projects among different racial groups can ultimately reduce racist beliefs among participants. In this case, a stronger community identity allowed for civic dialogue across different racial identities, which created a safe artistic space.

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Barriers to Arts Participation

Another portion of sociological literature addresses the social forces that determine who can participate in the arts. A majority of previous works within this topic have acknowledged cultural capital as the driving force of inequality in the arts (Banks 2010; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Kavolis 1966; Khan 2013; Morimoto and Friedland 2013; Yuksek, Dumais, and Kamo 2019). Based on Bourdieu's (1983) perspective of social classes maintaining different levels of cultural capital, individuals of different socioeconomic status have varied tastes and consumption styles. These previous studies distinguish the differences between lowbrow, midbrow, and highbrow arts, which range from most accessible to least accessible forms of arts. Therefore, wealthier individuals are most likely to participate in forms of highbrow arts, which include opera, ballet, and classical music performances (Yuksek et al. 2019:508). Therefore, highbrow arts become a status marker by associating these performances as intellectual, elite, and sophisticated.

Previous literature has also identified the significant relationship between education and arts participation. Similarly to individuals with higher income levels, individuals with more education are more likely to have the cultural resources and taste to consume and participate in the arts (Reeves 2015). The college application process even favors students with more extracurricular activities, so students who already have experience with the arts are even more likely to pursue higher education. Even if individuals might have money to participate in the arts, education cultivates more interest and resources for the arts.

Interestingly, gender socialization also plays a role in arts participation. According to Christin (2012), parents are more likely to enroll daughters in art classes than sons. Later in life,

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women are often more likely than men to attend arts performances, especially within the category of the highbrow arts. Not only does education have a relationship with arts participation, but gender impacts arts education, which later impacts an individual's taste for the arts and arts participation later in life. Therefore, it is essential to control for gender in my analysis.

Decline of Cultural Capital in the Arts

In the twenty-first century, many sociologists have questioned if the arts are becoming less of a status marker and if arts participation in general is declining. DiMaggio and Muktar (2004) found that rates of attendance at arts events declined between 1982 and 2002, which suggests that the arts now face more competition from other activities. Additionally, the reduction between public membership and highbrow arts participation over time shows that the arts might be losing its significance as a status marker for people who are more educated or affluent than others (Yukseket al. 2019). This informs my research question because by studying if there is a relationship with civic engagement, I can assess if there are more community-based effects of the arts across social classes.

Predictors of Civic Engagement

While cultural and economic capital are often essential in explaining arts participation levels, social capital is more relevant in literature focused around rates of civic engagement. In the 1830s, De Tocqueville (1835) established the unique social condition in the United States of civic activity and participation in voluntary organizations. Even without coining the term social capital, De Tocqueville laid the groundwork for sociologists like Bourdieu and other academics to later define and analyze social capital. Although a political scientist, Putnam (2000) has

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greatly contributed to sociological studies of social capital in the twenty-first century. Putnam theorized that when people interact with each other through associational activities such as choir practice, they develop trust with each other and have a moral foundation to base future community involvement on. Therefore, political participation works more efficiently with more social capital.

Within literature focused around civic engagement, voluntarism and education have been strong predictors for civic engagement. Walker (2008:139) found support for the “theory of unintentional mobilization,” which notes how associational life indirectly promotes direct engagement in the political system. He also found that members of non-political voluntary organizations are more likely to participate in politics, but that members of political voluntary organizations are more likely to become activists (139). This finding is essential for my research because if people participate in non-political voluntary activities in the arts, they also may be more likely to participate in politics and other public activities. When looking at education, Morimoto and Friedland (2013:523) found that youth “link civic engagement with ambition and achievement as a means to build capital in a Bourdieuan field of youth achievement.” Therefore, academic achievement builds confidence to publically participate in communities and government.

One common question in sociological literature is if civic engagement is declining over time and what forces could increase civic engagement. Wuthnow (2003) acknowledged how social capital has been declining since the 1950s, but how newer ways of connecting with friends and neighbors have emerged. He also noted how a significant portion of the decline in social capital has occurred among marginal groups whose living situations have been unfavorable

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during this time period “marginal groups whose living situations have become more difficult during this period” (Wuthnow 2003:44). Marginal groups also need resources such as “adequate incomes, sufficient safety to venture out of their homes, and such amenities such as child care and transportation” to create social capital” (44). Therefore, factors such as income must be controlled for when looking at civic engagement.

Even though a wide range of literature exists surrounding the arts and civic engagement, the common themes of cultural production of art, identity and identification in art, barriers to arts participation, the decline of cultural capital in arts participation, and predictors of civic engagement are all essential to my research question. Based on this previous literature, I must question how these various approaches support my hypothesis that people who have attended a performance or art exhibit in the last year participate in more public activities and spend more social evenings with their neighbors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Capital

According to Bourdieu’s theory, social capital is the combination of actual or potential resources that affect an individual’s network of institutionalized relationships (Bourdieu 1983). I argue that arts participation functions as social capital by being both an associational activity and strengthening community ties. Firstly, arts participation functions as an associational activity that bonds individuals to their communities. Through shared aesthetic taste, respondents are using art as a resource to communicate and network with others. Additionally, identity and identification are essential in linking arts participation to social capital by allowing individuals to further

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identify with their local and national communities and to participate in civic dialogue surrounding their individual and community identities.

Similarly to other past literature, I argue that social capital increases civic engagement (Putnam 2000; Wuthnow 2002). Theorists such as Wuthnow (2002) have argued that social capital strengthens community ties, which encourages individuals to advocate for social issues and participate politically. Through this theoretical framework, I expect that social capital through arts participation affects both community engagement and participation in politics. Therefore, with more participation in the arts, I predict that respondents will be more connected to their local and national communities, which increases their chances of voting, socializing with neighbors and friends, and spending social evenings in public places like bars.

Cultural Capital

Although cultural capital cannot entirely describe the relationship between arts participation and civic engagement, the theoretical framework is essential in my choice of control variables. When studying cultural capital, Bourdieu (1983) acknowledged the positive relationship between economic and cultural capital. Many sociologists who have studied arts participation have applied this relationship by recognizing how wealthier people with higher levels of education are more likely to participate in the arts due to due more taste in the arts (Banks 2010; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Khan 2013; Morimoto and Friedland 2013; Yuksek, Dumais, and Kamo 2019) Therefore, respondents with more years of education and higher family incomes are more likely to attend arts performances and art exhibits. However, recent theorists have suggested that arts participation is becoming less of a status marker, so cultural capital might not be as relevant. Therefore, this study tests the conflicting views of cultural

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capital and arts participation by controlling for education and family income along with other various demographic variables.

RESEARCH METHODS

The 2016 General Social Survey

For my research, I rely on the General Social Survey (GSS) from 2016 to examine the relationship between arts participation and civic engagement. The GSS has been conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) annually since 1972, except for the years 1979, 1981, and 1992, and then biennially beginning in 1994. The NORC conducts the survey through 90-minute face-to-face interviews to gather data on contemporary American society to analyze changes in attitudes, behaviors, and attributes. In 2016, there were 2,867 respondents with a response rate of 61 percent (Smith et al. 2016). The population that this survey samples from consists of English and Spanish speaking adults over 18 across the United States. My unit of analysis is the individual and I utilize variables from the standard core of demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal questions as well as the Arts and Culture module. After accounting for missing data across the variables, I am limited to studying 438 cases. For more information on how the data was collected, see <http://gss.norc.org/>.

Measures

Independent variables. To assess arts participation, I use two independent variables from the Arts and Culture module to measure performance and art exhibit attendance. To measure if the respondent went to a performance in the past 12 months, the GSS asked, “With the exception of elementary or high school performances, did you go to a live music, theater, or dance performance, during the last 12 months?” To measure if the respondent went to an art exhibit in

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the past 12 months, the GSS asked, “During the last 12 months, did you go to an art exhibit, such as paintings, sculpture, textiles, graphic design, or photography?” Respondents could answer both of these questions with yes or no. I dummied both of these variables to ensure that zero equals no and one equals yes.

Dependent variables. As a proxy measure for civic engagement, I use 4 variables from the GSS to create a public activities index. This public activities index assesses electoral civic engagement, sociability among neighbors and friends, and sociability in public spaces like bars. To assess the respondent’s level of electoral civic engagement, I utilize if they voted in the 2012 election. The GSS asked, “In 2012, you remember that Obama ran for President on the Democratic ticket against Romney for the Republicans. Do you remember for sure whether or not you voted in that election?” The respondents could answer this question with voted, did not vote, ineligible. I dummied this variable to create a did vote variable, in which respondents who “voted” equal one and respondents who “did not vote” or were “ineligible” equal zero. To assess how often the respondent spends an evening with a neighbor, spends an evening with friends outside of the neighborhood, and goes to a bar or tavern, the GSS asked, “Would you use this card and tell me which answer comes closest to how often you do the following things... B. Spend a social evening with someone who lives in your neighborhood? C. Spend a social evening with friends who live outside the neighborhood? D. Go to a bar or tavern?” Respondents could answer with almost daily, several times a week, several times a month, once a month, several times a year, once a year, or never. I dummied all three of these variables to create variables that assess if the respondent spends a social evening with someone who lives in their neighborhood, spends a social evening with friends who live outside the neighborhood, and

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spends a social evening at a bar or tavern. Therefore, one includes the respondents who answered “almost daily, several times a week, several times a month, once a month, several times a year, once a year” and zero includes the respondents who answered “never.” To create a public activities index, I added up the dummy variables of respondents who did vote, spend a social evening with someone who lives in their neighborhood, spend a social evening with friends who live outside the neighborhood, and go to a bar or tavern. Therefore, the public activities index ranges from respondents who participated in zero public activities to respondents who participated in four public activities. The Cronbach’s Alpha for this variable is 0.34, which indicates that the public activities index has a low reliability rate. This low reliability is likely due to the difference of answers between the voting and sociability variables, but the variable is still essential in measuring how active respondents are in varied forms of public activities.

While the public activities measures how many public activities a respondent participated in, I also want to measure how often the respondent is interacting with their community. Therefore, I utilize the sociability with neighbor variable to measure how often the respondent spends a social evening with someone who lives in their neighborhood as another dependent variable. For this dependent variable, I recode the original answers of almost daily, several times a week, several times a month, once a month, several times a year, once a year, or never to ratio instead of ordinal values. When recoding this variable, I interpreted “several” as three days. I also interpreted “almost daily” as 300 days in a year. Therefore, my new variable recodes almost daily to 300 days, several times a week to 156 days, several times a month to 36 days, once a month to 12 days, several times a year to three days, once a year to one day, and never to zero

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days. This variable quantifies how often individuals are interacting with people in their local communities.

Control variables. First, I utilize the control variables that have been most common in previous literature: education and income. These variables will be essential to question how cultural capital impacts arts attendance. For education, the GSS asked, “What is the highest grade in elementary school or high school that you finished and got credit for?” Respondents could answer with numerical values from 0-20. To assess total family income, the GSS asked, “In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year -- 2015 -- before taxes, that is. Just tell me the letter. Total income includes interest or dividends, rent, Social Security, other pensions, alimony or child support, unemployment compensation, public aid (welfare), armed forces or veteran's allotment.” Respondents could choose income brackets from under \$1,000 to \$170,000 and over. I recoded the ordinal-level family income variable into a ratio measure by changing the value labels to the midpoints of the income brackets. For example, I recoded the range of \$1,000 to \$2,999 to the midpoint of \$1,999.50. For the first and last values of under \$1,000 and \$170,000 and over, I recoded them as \$1,000 and \$170,000.

Additionally, I will control for demographic variables such as sex, race, and if the respondent was born in the United States. The GSS coded the respondent's sex as either male or female. I created a dummy variable for women with values of zero as men and one as women. For race, the GSS asked, “What race do you consider yourself?” I created a dummy variable with values of zero as non-white and one as white. Respondents were also asked “Was R born in this country” and could respond with either yes or no. I dummied place of birth by coding respondents not born in the country as zero and respondents born in the country as one.

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Lastly, I control for urban residents, age, and work status, since I predict that these variables impact the time and accessibility that the respondent has for the arts. It is important to control for urban respondents because they live in close proximity to large arts and cultural institutions. The GSS provides the respondent's size of place, which includes: city greater than 250,000, city 50,000-250,000, suburb of a large city, suburb of a medium city, unincorporated of a large city, unincorporated of a medium city, city 10,000-49,999, town greater than 2,500, smaller areas, and open country. I dummied urban residents by coding residents in cities greater than 250,000 and cities between 50,000-250,000 as one and all else as zero. Age is also a notable variable, since older respondents often have had more time to build ties with their communities. The GSS asked for the respondent's age and coded respondent's ages 18 through 88 to the corresponding number of their ages and collapsed respondents 89 and older into a single category. Controlling for working respondents takes into account how respondents who are not working may have more leisure time, but respondents who are working have higher incomes and more social ties with coworkers. To assess the respondent's labor force status, the GSS asked, "Last week were you working full time, part time, going to school, keeping house, or what?" Respondents could answer with working full time, working part time, temporarily not working, unemployed or laid off, retired, school, keeping house, or other. I created a dummy variable for working respondents with respondents who are not working coded as zero and respondents working full time or part time coded as one.

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FINDINGS

Univariate Results

Table 1 portrays the means, medians, and standard deviations of the independent, dependent, and control variables and Figures 1-2 portray the distributions of arts participation. Figure 1 shows that 40 percent of respondents attended an arts performance in the last 12 months, while Figure 2 depicts that more than 30 percent of respondents attended an art exhibit in the last 12 months. According to Table 1, respondents varied on average from the mean of performance attendance by 0.489 and from the mean of art exhibit attendance by 0.466.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Figures 3-6 illustrate the distribution of the variables used to create the public activities index. Figure 3 portrays that a majority of respondents voted in the 2012 election, but less than 30 percent of respondents did not vote and less than 10 percent of respondents were ineligible to vote. Figure 4 portrays how nearly 40 percent of respondents never spend a social evening with their neighbor in a 12 month period, but most respondents spend more moderate amounts of time with their neighbors. Figure 5 illustrates a more normal distribution for the number of social evenings that respondent spends with friends, indicating that most respondents spend an evening with friends either several times a month, once a month, or several times a year. On the other hand, Figure 6 portrays a clearer division between respondents who do and do not spend a social evening in a bar since nearly half of respondents never spend an evening at a bar.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

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[Insert Figure 4 about here]

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

[Insert Figure 6 about here]

When looking at the dependent variables, Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of the public activities index and Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of social evenings the respondent spends with a neighbor during a year. Figure 7 demonstrates how nearly all of the respondents were involved in public activities, since only two percent of respondents participated in zero public activities. Table 1 demonstrates that on average, respondents participated in three out of four activities on the public activities index, but they on average varied from the mean by one activity. Table 1 shows that respondents on average spend 41 social evenings with a neighbor per year. On average, respondents varied from the mean by approximately 74 days. Since the median of three days is notably lower than the mean, the distribution of social evenings with a neighbor is skewed to the right. According to Figure 3, the distribution is skewed to the right because the most common response was that respondents never spend a social evening with a neighbor.

[Insert Figure 7 about here]

Figures 8-14 display the distributions of the control variables. Figure 8 portrays how a majority of respondents completed 12 years or more of education. 32 percent of respondents completed 12 years of education, which implies a high school education. 18 percent of respondents completed 16 years of education, which implies a college education. Table 1 notes how on average respondents completed 14 years of education and varied from the mean by 3 years of education. Figure 9 portrays the wide variation in total family incomes across

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respondents. According to Table 1, respondents on average reported total family incomes of \$62,219, but there was a substantial standard deviation of \$47,904. This standard deviation illuminates a right skew in the distribution, which signifies that more respondents earned higher incomes. According to Figure 10, 54 percent of respondents identified as men, while 46 percent of respondents identified as women. Figure 11 portrays how 74 percent of respondents identified as white, 19 percent identified as black, and 7 percent identified as another race. Figure 12 portrays that 88 percent of respondents were born in the United States, while 12 percent of respondents were born in another country. Figure 12 demonstrates that respondents live in many different sized places. According to Table 1, 34 percent of respondents live in cities with populations greater than 50,000 people. Table 1 also portrays that respondents on average were 48 years old and 62 percent of them were employed. On average, the age of respondents varied from the mean by 18 years, so there was variation in the age of respondents.

[Insert Figure 8 about here]

[Insert Figure 9 about here]

[Insert Figure 10 about here]

[Insert Figure 11 about here]

[Insert Figure 12 about here]

[Insert Figure 13 about here]

[Insert Figure 14 about here]

Bivariate Results

Table 2 portrays the correlations between public activities index, social evenings with neighbor, and 10 other variables. Firstly, there is a statistically significant, weak to moderate, and

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positive relationship between both performance attendance and art exhibit attendance with the public activities index. This correlation indicates that respondents who attended a performance or an art exhibit in the last 12 months scored higher on the public activities index. There is a statistically significant, weak to moderate, positive relationship between education and public activities, which illustrates that respondents with more years of education participated in more public activities. There is a statistically significant, weak to moderate, positive relationship between family income and public activities, which notes that respondents with higher family incomes also participated in more public activities. There is a statistically significant, weak, and positive relationship between if a respondent is born in the United States and the public activities index, which illuminates that respondents born in the United States participated in more public activities. There is a statistically significant, weak, and positive relationship between employed respondents and the public activities index, which shows that respondents working part time or full time participated in more public activities. Women, white, urban, and age do not have statistically significant correlations with the public activities index.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Table 2 portrays that performance and art exhibit attendance do not have statistically significant relationships with social evenings with neighbor. However, there is a statistically significant, weak, and negative relationship between family income and social evenings with neighbor, which indicates that respondents with higher family incomes spend fewer social evenings with a neighbor per year. There is also a statistically significant, weak, and negative relationship between employed respondents and social evenings with neighbor, which signifies that respondents who work part or full time spend fewer social evenings with a neighbor per

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year. Education, women, white, US born, and age do not have statistically significant correlations with social evenings with neighbor.

Table 2 also indicates which control variables impact performance and art exhibit attendance. There is a statistically significant, moderate, and positive relationship between performance attendance and art exhibit attendance, which implies that respondents who attended a performance in the last 12 months were also more likely to attend an art exhibit in the last 12 months. There is a statistically significant, weak to moderate, and positive association between education with performance and art exhibit attendance, which notes that respondents with more years of education were more likely to attend a performance or an art exhibit in the last 12 months. There is a statistically significant, weak to moderate, and positive association between family income with performance and art exhibit attendance, which indicates that respondents with higher incomes were more likely to attend a performance or an art exhibit in the last 12 months. Women, respondents born in the country, urban respondents, and age do not have statistically significant correlations with performance or art exhibit attendance.

Multivariate Results

Table 3 displays the regression of public activities index and social evenings with neighbor on all variables. The regression model for the public activities index is statistically significant, while the regression model for social evenings with neighbor is not statistically significant.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

The first model in Table 3 portrays that 19 percent of the variability in the public activities index can be explained by performance attendance, art exhibit attendance, and 8

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control variables. Both of the independent variables are statistically significant predictors of the public activities index, as well as the control variables education, family income, and age. If respondents attended a performance or an art exhibit in the last 12 months, they participated in significantly more public activities. Among control variables, respondents with more years of education, higher family incomes, and those who were older participated in more public activities. Education is the strongest predictor of the number of public activities that a respondent participates in, followed by family income, art exhibit, age, and performance. This regression equation supports the hypothesis that respondents who attended a performance or art exhibit in the last 12 months participated in more public activities.

The second model in Table 3 shows that only four percent of the variability in social evenings with neighbor can be explained by performance attendance, art exhibit attendance, and 8 control variables. The only statistically significant predictor of social evenings with neighbor is family income. The higher family income that a respondent reported, the fewer social evenings they reported spending with a neighbor per year. Since performance and art exhibit attendance have no statistical significance, the second hypothesis that respondents who attended a performance or art exhibit in the last 12 months spend more social evenings with neighbors per year must be rejected.

DISCUSSION

This study supports the hypothesis that respondents who attended a performance or art exhibit in the last year participated in public activities, but rejects the hypothesis that respondents who attended a performance or art exhibit in the last year spend more social evenings with neighbors per year. Additionally, the results uncover that education, family income, and age are

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predictors of participation in public activities and family income as a predictor of sociability with neighbors. These findings can largely be explained by the cultural capital and social capital theoretical framework as well as other findings from previous literature.

Participation in Public Activities

Firstly, the bivariate correlations support the cultural capital framework by uncovering barriers to arts participation. Consistent with past research surrounding arts participation, both education and family income are predictors of performance and art exhibit attendance, which indicates that education and family income provide more cultural capital for individuals to participate in the arts (DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Khan 2013; Morimoto and Friedland 2013; Yuksek, Dumais, and Kamo 2019). According to Bourdieu (1983), individuals of different socioeconomic status inherently have varied consumption styles and taste. Therefore, wealthier and highly educated individuals are more likely to attend performances or art exhibits as a status symbol. Even though free performances and art exhibits exist, individuals with higher incomes and more years of education also have the financial resources to attend art exhibits and performances with paid admission.

The regression results support the social capital framework since performance and art exhibit attendance are statistically significant predictors of the public activities index even when controlling for education, income, and six other variables. This finding supports my hypothesis because by attending a performance or art exhibit, respondents build social capital through art participation's function of being an associational activity and strengthening community ties. Viewing art with others allows people to find validity through shared perceptions, which can create a stronger sense of community identification (Kelaher et al. 2014; Wohl 2015). By

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attending performances and art exhibits, people can network with other community members through their shared tastes, which increases their likelihood of spending future social evenings with friends and neighbors. Art surrounding social and political issues can spark civic dialogue, which can motivate individuals to vote and continue discussing these issues with their friends and neighbors. If individuals identify with a performance or art exhibit on a personal or cultural level, they might feel more comfortable to engage with their community.

Interestingly, art exhibit attendance was a stronger predictor of the public activities index than performance attendance. According to the univariable results, more respondents attended a performance in the last 12 months than an art exhibit. Therefore, the smaller portion of respondents who attended an art exhibit likely have a stronger interest in the arts and a higher motivation to attend public events in their community. Art exhibit attendance could build social capital at a slightly higher rate than art performances, which increases the respondent's likelihood to vote, socialize with neighbors, socialize with friends, and socialize at a bar.

Despite the statistical significance of performance and art exhibit attendance, education had the strongest effect on engagement in public activities in the regression equation. This finding is consistent with previous literature because more years of education allows individuals to be more voluntaristic, which allows them to build social capital and participate in public activities (Morimoto and Friedland 2013; Walker 2008). After education, family income was the next strongest predictor of public activities. Respondents with a higher family income participated in more public activities, which could also be related to the finding that respondents with more years of education earn higher family incomes. Age was also a statistically significant predictor of public activities, which indicates that older respondents participated in more public

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activities. With the social capital approach, older respondents have had more years to network and strengthen ties with their communities.

Although not statistically significant on the multivariate level, country of birth and employment status still have statistically significant yet weak relationships with participation in public activities on the bivariate level. Respondents who were born in the United States participated in more public activities, which could be attributed to how they are more likely to be eligible to vote. Employed respondents are more likely to participate in public activities, which also can be a function of social capital. When individuals work, they consistently interact with others and build networks, which could increase their likelihood of participating in public activities.

However, the low reliability of the public activities index must be taken into account while analyzing these findings. Since if a respondent voted in the 2012 election and the respondent's sociability with neighbors, friends, and at a bar are all measured differently, the public activities index cannot produce a high Cronbach's alpha score and must be addressed as a limitation of this study.

Sociability with Neighbors

Even though my hypothesis predicted otherwise, the absence of a statistically significant relationship between performance and art exhibit attendance and sociability with neighbors illuminates the complications associated with community involvement in the twenty-first century. Since theorists such as Putnam (2000) and Wuthnow (2002) acknowledged how social capital has been declining since the 1950s, people in general have been spending less time with their neighbors. If people are spending less time with neighbors, then sociability with neighbors

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is not an ideal measure to assess how often individuals are engaging with other community members. Additionally, measuring sociability with neighbors can be subjective because some people classify people who live directly next to them as their neighbors, while others might classify people in their larger neighborhood radius as their neighbors.

Additionally, both the bivariate and multivariate results reveal that respondents with a higher family income reported spending fewer social evenings with neighbors during a year. With a higher family income, individuals might own larger residences, which places them in further proximity from their neighbors. Wealthy individuals also have access to more activities during their leisure time, so they are less likely to spend time with their neighbors. On the other hand, working class and lower income communities often live in close proximity to their neighbors, which allows them to socialize spend more time with their neighbors and participate more in their communities.

CONCLUSION

Building on previous research surrounding arts participation and civic engagement, this research helps fill in the gap of sociological research assessing the relationship between arts participation and civic engagement (Christin 2012; DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly 2015; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Hanquinet 2013; Kavolis 1966; Kelaher et al. 2014; Langdridge, Gabb and Lawson 2019; Reeves 2015; Walker 2008; Wuthnow 2002; Yusek, Dumais and Kamo 2019). Using 438 cases from the 2016 General Social Survey, I conducted regression analyses to assess the relationship between art attendance in the last 12 months and both participation in public activities and sociability with neighbors. I hypothesized that respondents who went to a live music, theater, or dance performance or an art exhibit in the past 12 months would

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participate in more public activities and spend a social evening with someone who lives in their neighborhood more frequently. My results provided partial support for my hypothesis; respondents who attended a performance or art exhibit participated in significantly more public activities, but did not spend significantly more social evenings with their neighbors per year.

Overall, these findings support the social capital theoretical framework. By classifying performances and art exhibits as associational activities, they bond people together through shared aesthetic taste, allow people to identify with the art itself, and allow communities participate in civic dialogue. With stronger ties to their communities, individuals are more likely to vote and socialize with neighbors, friends, and with other community members in public spaces like bars. Additionally, these findings reinforce how cultural capital inherently creates inequality in the arts. This study found that individuals with more years of education and higher family incomes are more likely to attend performances and art exhibits.

Limitations

Firstly, this study was limited by data access and the operationalization of civic engagement. Unfortunately, the General Social Survey included the political participation module in the 2014 survey and the arts and culture module in the 2016 survey. By choosing to use the arts and culture module in 2016, I was limited to creating a public activities index and using the sociability with neighbors variables as proxy measures for civic engagement. Variables included in the GSS's 2014 civic engagement module such as if respondents signed a petition, have done volunteer work for a charity, and voted on specific measures would have been beneficial to my research question. The low reliability of the public activities index indicated by Cronbach's alpha score draws attention to the difference in measurement of the voted in 2012

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variable, social evenings with neighbor variable, social evening with friends variable, and social evening at a bar variable. Therefore, more similar measures focused more specifically around civic engagement would have been helpful in my research.

Secondly, this study was limited by only assessing the attendance of performances and art exhibits in the last 12 months. Ideally, more comprehensive measures would provide a more accurate representation of an individual's arts participation. For example, measuring an individual's arts education would be helpful in assessing their access to the arts growing up and how that access impacts their arts participation later in life. The GSS provided dichotomous measures of performance and art exhibit attendance, but access to variables that measure the frequency of performance and art exhibit attendance would be beneficial in my research. Also, measuring the respondent's personal art practice could help differentiate the effects of physical art practice versus exposure to art produced by others.

Lastly, this study was limited by the amount of cases that I had access to. With only 438 cases, these results cannot generalize about the entire United States population. Although my findings begin to assess the relationship between arts participation and civic engagement, future researchers must address the limitations of this study.

Future Implications

To further explore the relationship between arts participation and civic engagement, future research should address the limitations in this study to address if participation in the arts allows individuals to be more active citizens. Especially as more individuals and larger movements use art as a tool to create civic dialogue and enact change, this study calls for more synthesis of cultural sociology and political sociology. Researchers should continue using social

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and cultural capital frameworks to theorize the relationship between arts participation and civic engagement, but should also continue integrating other theoretical frameworks. By collecting more data and using more specific measures of arts participation and civic engagement, researchers can build upon these findings. Researchers should also continue asking what other forces allow individuals to participate more in their local and national communities.

Most importantly, this study illuminates that the arts can mobilize individuals to participate in public activities. Since there were not statistically significant relationships between performance attendance and art exhibit attendance with the number of social evenings a respondent spends with a neighbor per year, these results suggest that sociability with neighbors may not be a beneficial measure of community involvement in the twenty-first century. Future researchers should search for more reliable measures of community involvement. Lastly, this study also calls for more accessibility to the arts. By increasing federal funding for the arts, more individuals regardless of education and income levels can gain exposure to the arts. Ultimately, access to the arts could allow individuals to participate more in their communities.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Means, Medians, and Standard Deviations for Variables

Variable	Mean	Median	<i>SD</i>
Performance	0.40	0.00	0.489
Art exhibit	0.32	0.00	0.466
Public activities index	2.71	3.00	1.019
Social evenings with neighbor	40.77	3.00	74.288
Education	13.66	13.00	2.806
Total family income	62,219.28	44,999.50	47,904.031
Women	0.46	0.00	0.499
White	0.74	1.00	0.438
Born in the US	0.88	1.00	0.324
Urban resident (pop gt 50,000)	0.34	0.00	0.473
Age	48.38	48.00	17.587
Employed (full time or part time)	0.62	1.00	0.486

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Table 2. Correlations (*r*) between Public Activities Index, Social Evenings with Neighbor, and 10 other variables (*N* = 438)

Variable	Social Evenings with Neighbor	Performance	Art Exhibit	Education	Total Family Income	Women	White	US Born	Urban	Age	Employed
Public Activities Index	.175*	.268*	.278*	.335*	.277*	-.029	.091	.140*	-.023	.068	.109*
Social Evenings with Neighbor		-.059	.033	-.015	-.128*	-.024	.009	-.068	.013	.021	-.111*
Performance			.392*	.308*	.323*	-.017	.124*	.066	-.034	-.091	.150*
Art Exhibit				.379*	.209*	-.021	.144*	.068	.011	-.100	.128*
Education					.326*	-.014	.191*	.167*	.028	.002	.187*
Total Family Income						-.196*	.207*	.103*	-.075	-.005	.203*
Women							-.103*	.000	-.002	-.065	-.042
White								.187*	-.230*	.164*	-.052
US Born									-.021	.054	.019
Urban										.014	.009
Age											-.391*

**p* < .05

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Table 3. Regression of Public Activities and Social Evenings with Neighbor on All Variables

(*N* = 438)

Variable	Public Activities Index β	Social Evenings with Neighbor β
Performance	.112*	-.043
Art Exhibit	.140*	.073
Education	.187*	.036
Family Income	.142*	-.129*
Women	.012	-.051
White	-.043	.030
US Born	.077	-.066
Urban	-.021	.004
Age	.117*	-.021
Employed	.053	-.102
R^2	.192	.038
$F(10, 427)$	10.135*	1.677

* $p < .05$

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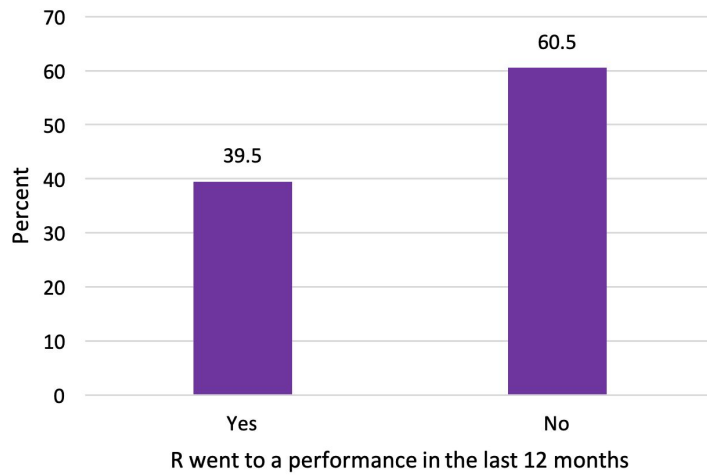


Figure 1. Bar Graph of Performance Attendance in the Last Twelve Months

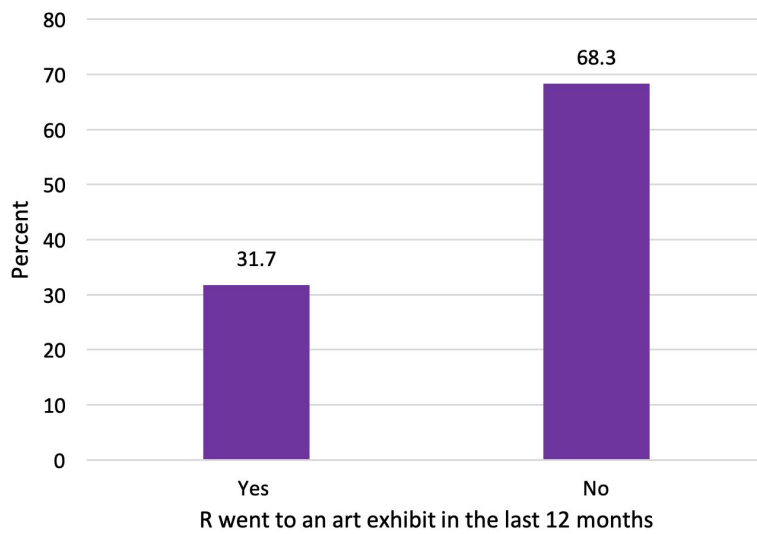


Figure 2. Bar Graph of Art Exhibit Attendance in the Last Twelve Months

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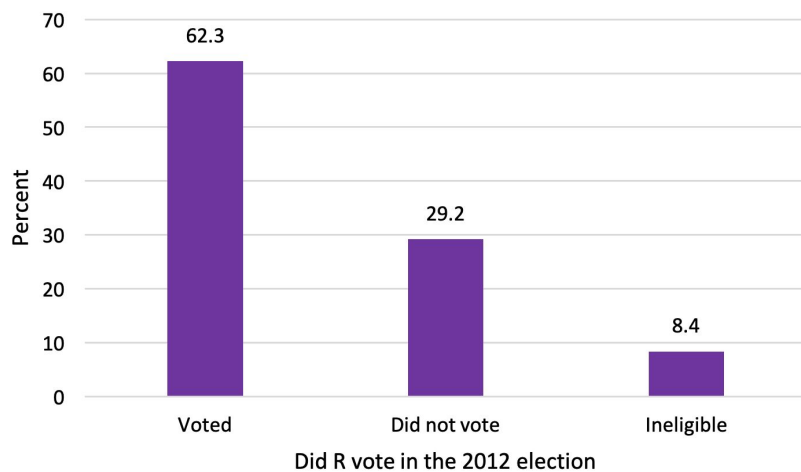


Figure 3. Bar Graph of Voting in 2012 Election

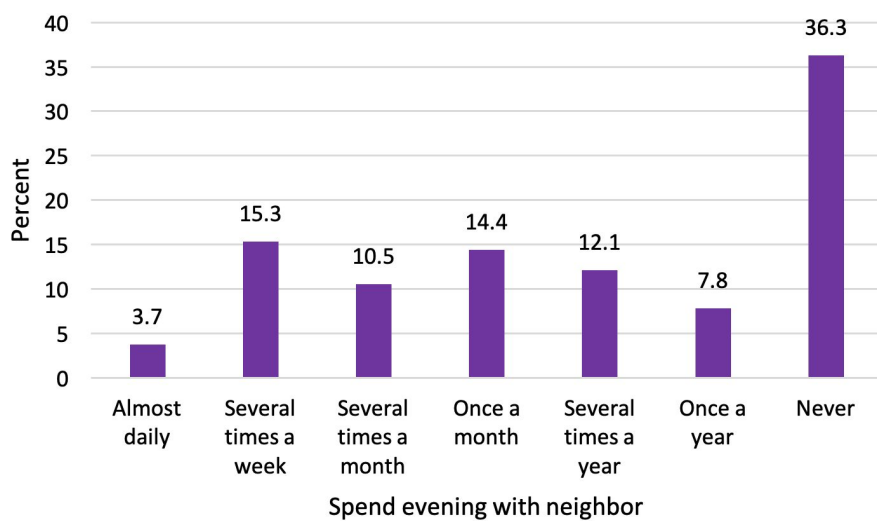


Figure 4. Bar Graph of How Often Respondent Spends Social Evenings with Neighbor

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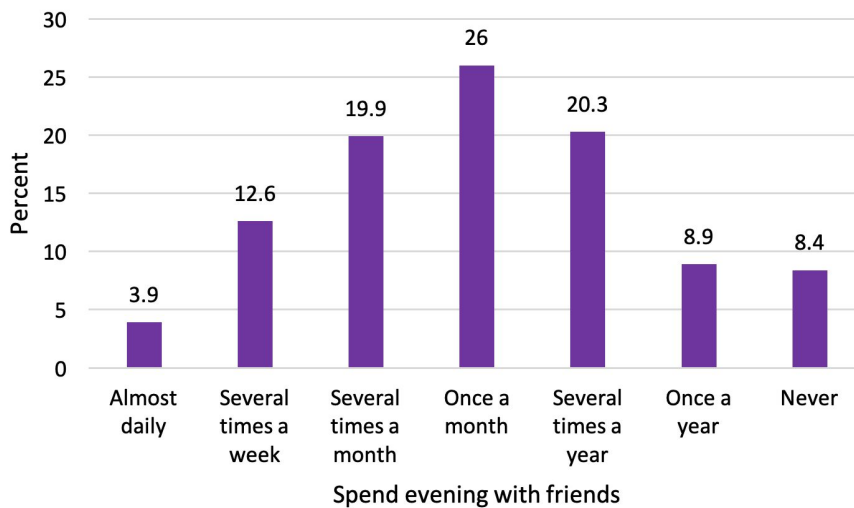


Figure 5. Bar Graph of How Often Respondent Spends Social Evenings with Friends

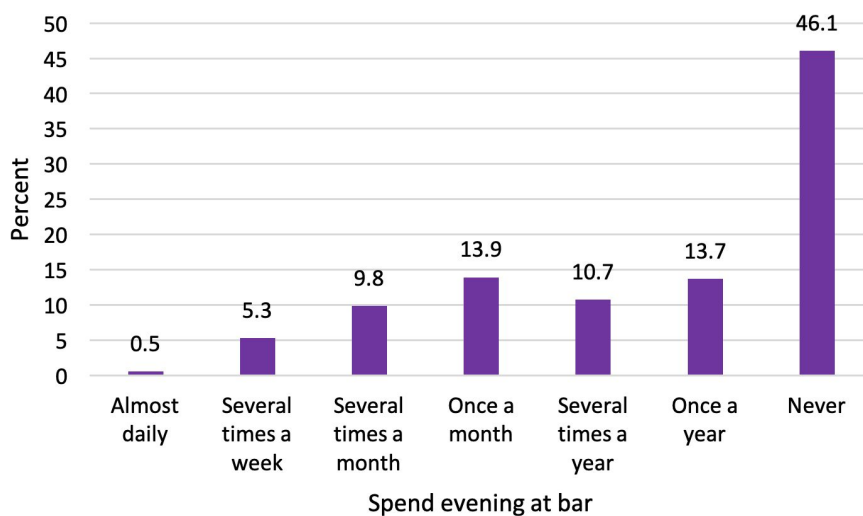


Figure 6. Bar Graph of How Often Respondents Spend Social Evenings at a Bar

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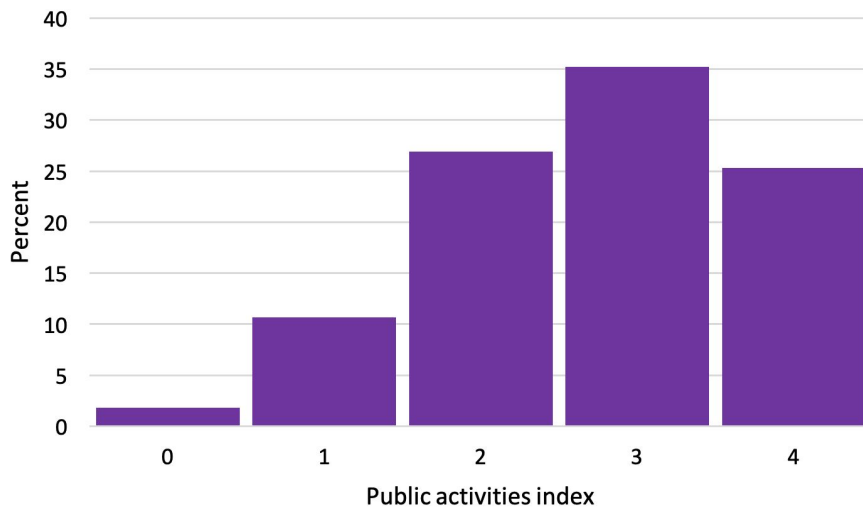


Figure 7. Histogram of Public Activities Index

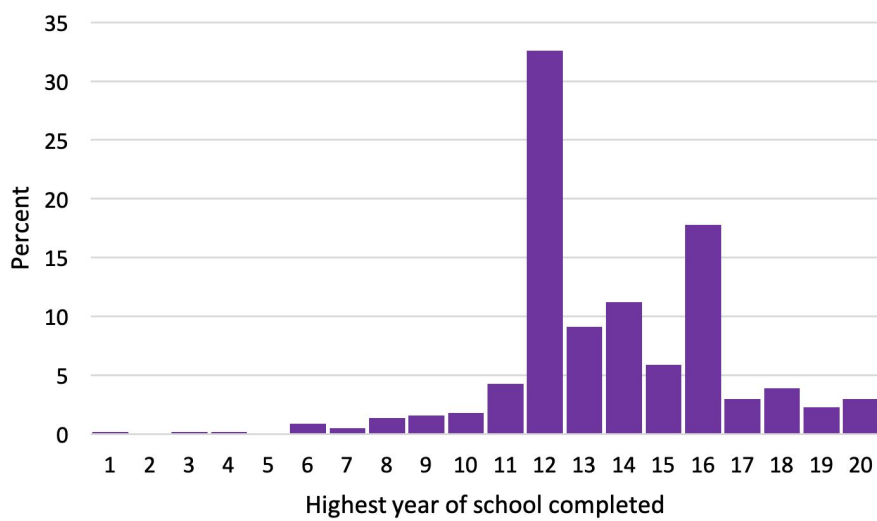


Figure 8. Histogram of Highest Year of School Completed

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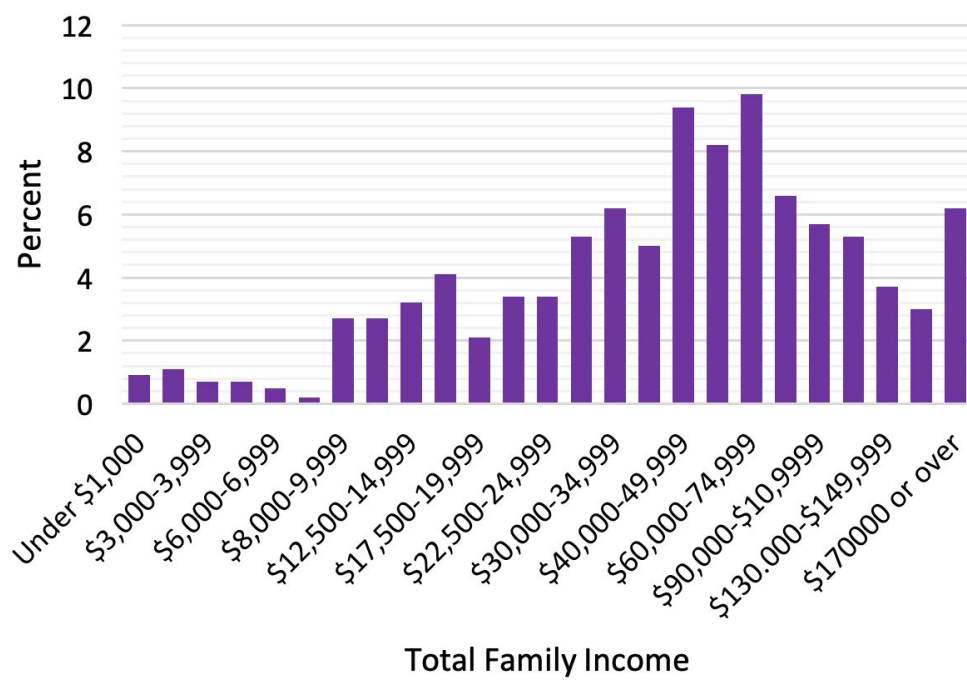


Figure 9. Bar Graph of Total Family Income

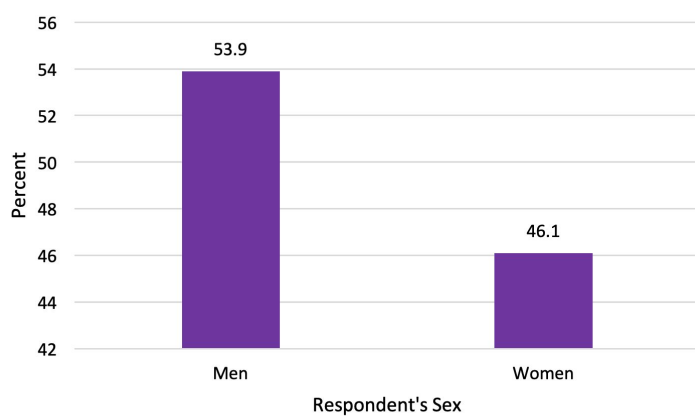


Figure 10. Bar Graph of Respondent's Sex

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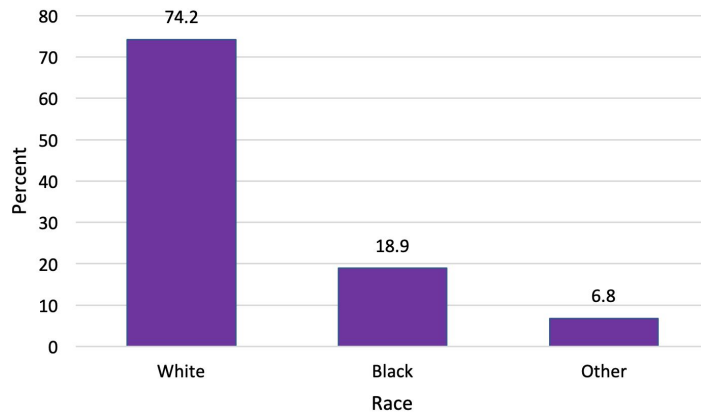


Figure 10. Bar Graph of Race

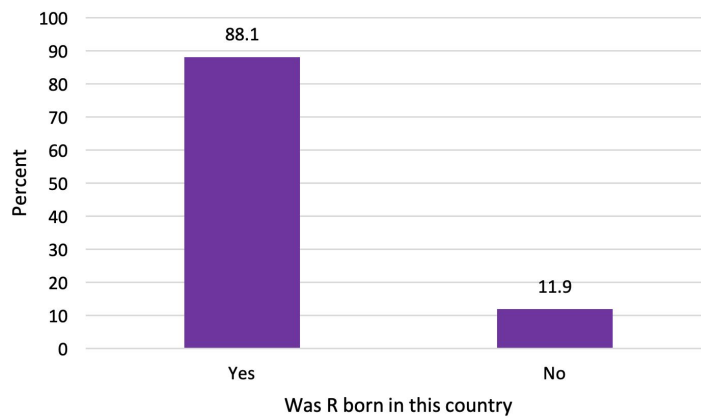


Figure 11. Bar Graph of Whether Respondent Was Born in the Country

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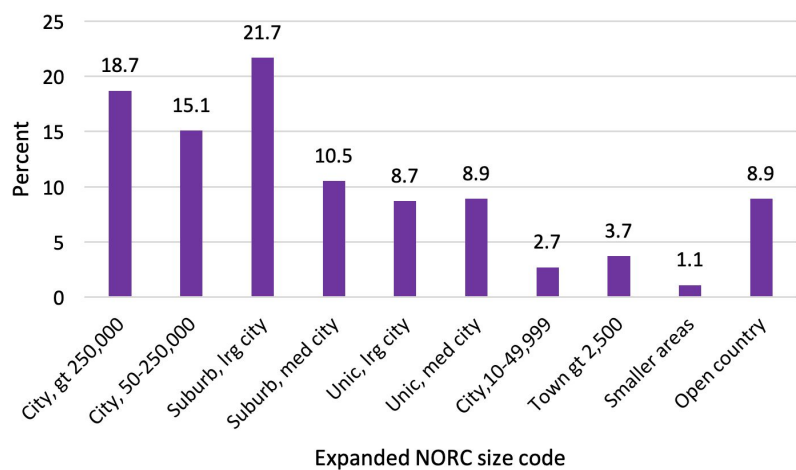


Figure 12. Bar Graph of Size of Place

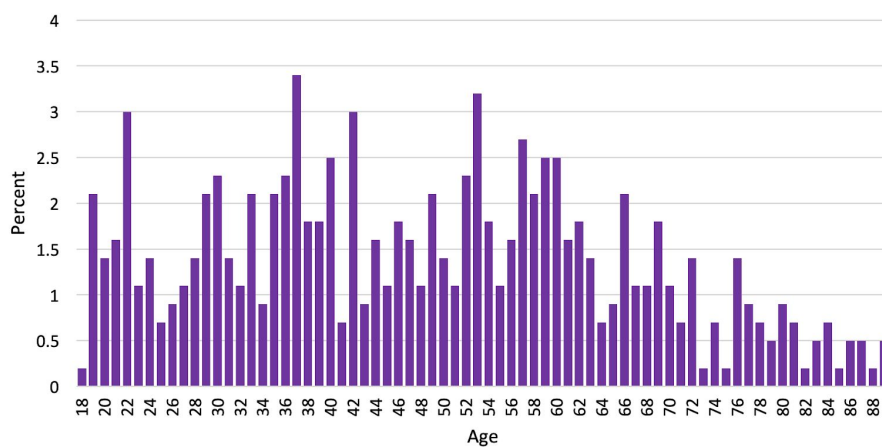


Figure 13. Histogram of Age

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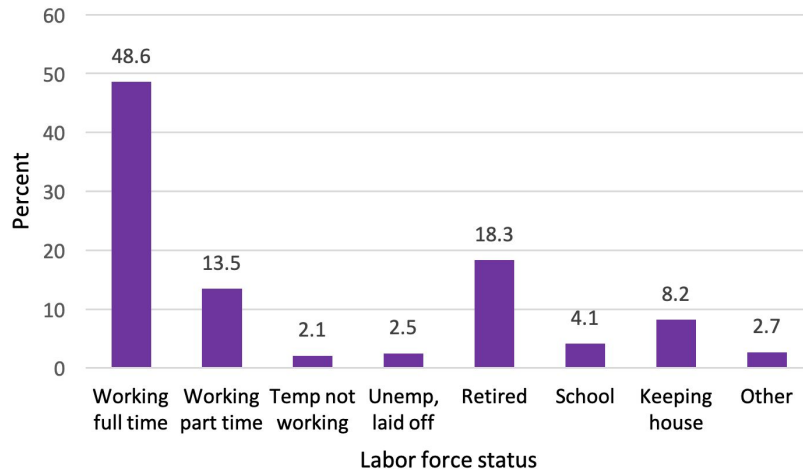


Figure 14. Bar Graph of Labor Force Status