

Can visiting an art gallery or reading a book change your life?

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Exploratory in nature, *Social Effects of Culture*, the 22nd report in the *Statistical Insights on the Arts* series from Hill Strategies Research, examines the relationship between four cultural activities (reading books, attending live performances, visiting art galleries and attending movie theatres) and specific social phenomena:

- Volunteering and Donating
- Neighbourhood Connections
- Sense of Belonging
- Social Activities
- Labour Force Participation
- Quality of Life

Many studies have outlined potential social effects of culture. However, these studies often have not provided statistics in support of the potential effects.

Because there are many other factors that could play a significant role in the social indicators examined in the report, the report does not claim to be definitive. However, some statistics do show a relationship between some cultural activities and positive social engagement:

- Art gallery visitors have a stronger sense of social engagement than non-visitors for many social indicators, including volunteering, donating, doing favours for neighbours, sense of belonging to Canada and not feeling trapped in a daily routine.
- Book readers also have a stronger sense of social engagement than non-readers for many social indicators, including volunteering, donating, doing favours for neighbours, sense of belonging to Canada and not being a workaholic.
- Given a mix of positive and neutral findings regarding performing arts attendees, there is mild evidence of a link between performing arts attendance and positive social engagement. Performing arts attendees do have positive indicators of social engagement for volunteering, donating, doing favours for neighbours, and not feeling trapped in a daily routine.
- Given the mix of positive, neutral and negative findings regarding movie goers, there is very little evidence of a link between movie theatre attendance and positive social engagement.

Methodological notes

The report includes as a cultural participant anyone who read at least one book, attended at least one live performance, visited at least one art gallery, or saw at least one movie at a theatre in 2005. This is a low threshold of cultural participation. The links to social engagement could be stronger for more frequent participants or participants in many different cultural activities.

In addition, many cultural activities do not have explicit social goals. As such, their social impacts may be less than for those cultural activities that have an explicit social goal.

The data is drawn from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey of 2005, an in-depth telephone survey of about 20,000 Canadians 15 years of age or older. Because of a split in the survey design, only half of the respondents were asked questions about their cultural and heritage activities in 2005. A total of 9,851 respondents answered the cultural questions.

Additional details about each cultural activity follow.

Art gallery attendance

For many social indicators, art gallery visitors have a stronger sense of social engagement than non-visitors. In particular:

- The percentage of art gallery visitors volunteering for a non-profit organization (50%) is much higher than the percentage of non-visitors (31%).
- The percentage of art gallery visitors donating money or goods to a non-profit organization (87%) is much higher than the percentage of non-visitors (73%).
- 76% of art gallery visitors (versus 67% of non-visitors) indicated that they had done a favour for a neighbour in the past month.
- 51% of art gallery visitors have a very strong sense of belonging to Canada, compared with 45% of non-visitors.
- Art gallery visitors have a stronger enjoyment of clubs and social organizations than non-participants.
- Fewer art gallery visitors than non-visitors feel trapped in a daily routine (30% of art gallery visitors compared with 38% of non-visitors).
- Art gallery visitors have a better self-assessment of health than non-visitors.

However, for some other indicators, there is very little or no difference between art gallery visitors and non-visitors (e.g., knowledge of neighbours, sense of belonging to one's community or province, overall happiness and rating of life as a whole).

There are no social indicators that point to art gallery visitors having a weaker sense of social engagement than non-visitors.

While there are many other factors that could play a significant role in the social indicators examined in the report, the positive findings regarding art gallery visitors indicate that there may indeed be a link between art gallery visits and positive social engagement. However, it is

not clear from the preliminary statistics in the report whether art gallery attendance has an impact on the social indicators, or whether some of the social indicators may have an impact on art gallery attendance. Further research could examine this potential relationship in greater detail.

Book reading

For many social indicators, book readers have a stronger sense of social engagement than non-readers. In particular:

- The percentage of book readers volunteering for a non-profit organization (42%) is much higher than the percentage of non-readers (25%).
- The percentage of book readers donating money or goods to a non-profit organization (82%) is much higher than the percentage of non-readers (66%).
- 71% of book readers (compared with 65% of non-readers) indicated that they had done a favour for a neighbour in the past month.
- 49% of book readers have a very strong sense of belonging to Canada, compared with 42% of non-readers.
- Book readers have a stronger enjoyment of clubs and social organizations than non-participants.
- Book readers have a lower rate of workaholism than non-readers (22% of book readers compared with 31% of non-readers)

However, for some other indicators, there is very little or no difference between book readers and non-readers (e.g., knowledge of neighbours, sense of belonging to one's community or province, and rating of life as a whole).

While there are many other factors that could play a significant role in the social indicators examined in the report, the positive findings regarding book readers indicate that there may indeed be a link between book reading and positive social engagement. However, it is not clear from the preliminary statistics in the report whether book reading has an impact on the social indicators, or whether some of the social indicators may have an impact on book reading. Further research could examine this potential relationship in greater detail.

Performing arts attendance

For many social indicators, attendees at performing arts events (including theatre, popular music, classical music, dance or opera) have a stronger sense of social engagement than non-attendees. In particular:

- The percentage of performing arts attendees volunteering for a non-profit organization (48%) is much higher than the percentage of non-attendees (28%).
- The percentage of performing arts attendees donating money or goods to a non-profit organization (85%) is much higher than the percentage of non-attendees (71%).
- 73% of performing arts attendees (compared with 67% of non-attendees) indicated that they had done a favour for a neighbour in the past month.

- Performing arts attendees have a stronger enjoyment of clubs and social organizations than non-participants.
- Fewer performing arts attendees than non-attendees feel trapped in a daily routine (33% of performing arts attendees compared with 38% of non-attendees).
- Performing arts attendees have a better self-assessment of health than non-attendees.

However, for many other indicators, there is very little or no difference between performing arts attendees and non-attendees (e.g., knowledge of neighbours, sense of belonging to one's community, to one's province or to Canada, overall happiness and rating of life as a whole).

Given the mix of positive and neutral findings regarding performing arts attendees, there is mild evidence of a link between performing arts attendance and positive social engagement. In addition, it is not clear from the preliminary statistics in the report whether performing arts attendance has an impact on the social indicators, or whether some of the social indicators may have an impact on performing arts attendance. There are many other factors that could play a significant role in the social indicators. Further research could examine these potential relationships in greater detail.

Movie theatre attendance

For a few social indicators, movie goers have a stronger sense of social engagement than non-goers. In particular:

- The percentage of movie goers volunteering for a non-profit organization (41%) is much higher than the percentage of non-goers (28%).
- The percentage of movie goers donating money or goods to a non-profit organization (79%) is higher than the percentage of non-goers (73%).
- Movie goers have a better self-assessment of health than non-goers.

However, for many other indicators, there is very little or no difference between movie goers and non-goers (e.g., doing a favour for a neighbour, sense of belonging to one's community, overall happiness and rating of life as a whole).

For a few other indicators, movie goers have a weaker sense of social engagement than non-goers (e.g., knowledge of neighbours and sense of belonging to one's province or to Canada).

Given the mix of positive, neutral and negative findings regarding movie goers, there is very little evidence of a link between movie theatre attendance and positive social engagement.

For more information

The full report, funded by the Canada Council for the Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Ontario Arts Council, is available free of charge on the Hill Strategies Research website (<http://www.hillstrategies.com>) and the websites of the funding organizations. A subsequent report, planned for the *Statistical Insights on the Arts* series, will examine some of the links to social engagement in greater detail.