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Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice

Publication details, including instructions for authors and
subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rahe20>

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Available online: 09 Feb 2012

To cite this article: Christina R. Davies, Michael Rosenberg, Matthew Knuiman, Renee Ferguson, Terri Pikora & Nicole Slatter (2012): Defining arts engagement for population-based health research: Art forms, activities and level of engagement, *Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, DOI:10.1080/17533015.2012.656201

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2012.656201>



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Defining arts engagement for population-based health research: Art forms, activities and level of engagement

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(Received 18 June 2011; final version received 6 January 2012)

Background: The arts and health evidence base needs to be grounded by common terminology and concepts from which original research and comparative studies can be developed. The aim of this study was to elucidate terminology central to understanding the arts and health causal pathway by defining arts engagement via art forms, activities and level (magnitude) of engagement. *Method:* The study design was cross-sectional. International experts ($n = 280$) completed an online survey about the concept of arts engagement (response fraction 44%) to generate a list of art forms and activities. Responses were analysed using NVivo. Participating experts then completed a second survey to rate activities by level of engagement (response fraction 57%). Ratings were analysed via descriptive statistics and factor analysis. *Results:* Arts engagement can be defined by five art forms – (1) performing arts; (2) visual arts, design and craft; (3) community/cultural festivals, fairs and events; (4) literature; and (5) online, digital and electronic arts – and measured via 91 activities. ‘Active’ arts activities had higher levels of engagement than ‘passive’ activities. *Conclusion:* Study findings provide guidance about which art forms and activities should be included in population surveys and provide a measurement of exposure for use in studies investigating the relationship between arts engagement and health.

Keywords: arts engagement; definition; population; health; arts activities

Background

Engaging in the arts can have a positive effect on well-being by encouraging self-understanding, expression, confidence, good self-esteem and interpersonal communication (Argyle & Bolton, 2005; Madden & Bloom, 2004; Parr, 2006). Arts engagement has also been associated with skills such as problem-solving, invention, novel thinking and innovation, and is an essential part of what keeps us connected with the self and others (Madden & Bloom, 2004; Star & Cox, 2008; Walsh, 2008). Although there are many examples of good practice and therapeutic uses for the arts, to date, most published arts or arts–health studies involve small numbers of participants or clinical populations rather than the general population. Where arts engagement studies have been conducted at a population level, research definitions are often inconsistent and vary considerably by art

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form and the types of activities used to identify people as engaged or not engaged in the arts (Costantoura, 2001).

A scientific approach to research is vital if we are to move the arts and health debate beyond anecdote and opinion (Hamilton, Hinks & Petticrew, 2003). An important part of this scientific approach is to elucidate key terminology and concepts. The establishment of common terminology and concepts means that we can design comparative population-based studies from which a strong arts and health evidence base can be developed (White, 2006). This article explores the definition of arts engagement in terms of art forms, a comprehensive list of current and emerging activities and quantifies each activity by magnitude or level of arts engagement.

Defining Arts Engagement

According to Dutton (2006), what the philosophy of the arts needs is an approach that treats arts engagement as a field of activities including its most problematic outliers. For reasons of validity (e.g. content, consensual and criterion), research questions about arts involvement need to be comprehensive so as to adequately measure engagement. For reasons of study reliability, the way researchers define arts engagement needs to be precise, consistent and objective. From a population perspective, the prevalence of arts engagement needs to be measured via a well-defined list of arts activities so that trends over time and demographic patterns can be evaluated accurately. When looking at the association between arts engagement and health, the definition of arts engagement needs to be robust enough to allow people to be categorised as engaged or not engaged in the arts and also enable the quantification of their level of engagement. Studies that are able to demonstrate an increased health benefit in association with an increased level of arts engagement will provide convincing evidence of a causal link between the arts and health.

A review of the literature provides insight into the parameters that are important for a comprehensive definition of arts engagement for population-based health research. The Australia Council for the Arts act defines arts engagement as creative and interpretative expression through theatre, literature, music, visual arts, film and crafts (Commonwealth of Australia, 1975). Conceptually, the method of defining arts engagement via a list of art forms is useful providing its formulation allows for new and emerging arts activities. In a recent study, the Australia Council defined arts engagement via the visual arts and craft, music, dance, theatre and literature with consideration given to engagement via creative participation or receptive attendance (Australia Council, 2010). This description is valuable as it emphasises the importance of defining arts engagement in terms of art forms and also highlights the importance of level of engagement (i.e. whether a person is actively making and creating art compared to receptively observing or listening to the arts).

Windsor (2005), in a study of arts engagement and general health in England, divided arts engagement into participation and attendance and rated engagement in terms of a list of 41 arts activities. Participation was defined in terms of creative activities (e.g. painting), sociable activities (e.g. singing to an audience) and physically demanding activities (e.g. dance). Attendance was defined in terms of being present at a performing arts event (e.g. play or drama, musical, cultural festival) or non-performing arts/cultural event (e.g. a film at a cinema, library, art gallery). This broad list of activities, as well as the distinction between participating in an arts activity as compared with viewing or listening to the activity, is useful. However, the way activities were categorised could be debated as both the visual arts and literature, which are normally considered to be art forms in their own right, were merged into the non-performing arts/culture category.

In 2009, The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the USA collected and analysed information about engagement in arts activities and leisure activities (National Endowment for the Arts, 2009). The arts were defined in terms of attending benchmark activities (e.g. jazz, musicals, ballet); visits to art museums/galleries, art/craft fairs, festivals, parks and historic sites; performing or creating art; reading literature and watching or listening to art via electronic media. Leisure activities included movies, sports, gardening, volunteering, charity work and community activities. This definition of arts engagement describes the arts in terms of activities and makes the distinction between arts activities and the “other types” of activities that people take part in. The need for a consistent definition of arts engagement is highlighted here, as if we compare the NEA definition of arts engagement to the previous definitions discussed, movies were included as part of the arts whereas the NEA classified movies as a leisure activity.

The aim of this study was to identify current art forms and activities that could be used in a definition of arts engagement for population-based health research via a scientific approach. The aim was to comprehensively list various types of arts activities and, once identified, quantify these activities in terms of the amount of arts engagement experienced by a person when they take part in these activities. A comprehensive list of activities was considered necessary so that future studies would have guidance about how to define arts engagement and give direction as to which activities researchers should measure when calculating a prevalence of arts engagement. As it is plausible that arts-related well-being outcomes are influenced by level of engagement in an arts activity, the development of an arts weighting for each activity was considered useful. It was envisioned that this measure would provide future studies with a means of quantifying arts engagement and hence facilitate a possible dose–response relationship with health and well-being outcomes.

Research Approach and Methodology

It was recognised that in order to understand the various art forms and activities it was necessary to gather the views of a broad group of experts in the field of the arts and arts–health. In this way, our definition of arts engagement could be guided by their knowledge and informed opinion. This cross-sectional study comprised two parts. First, an online survey of experts was conducted to explore the concept of arts engagement and to generate a comprehensive list of art forms and activities (survey one). A second, follow-up survey of participating experts was then conducted to rate the activities generated from survey one, in terms of the amount of arts engagement experienced when a person takes part in these activities (survey two). Online surveys were conducted as they could be personalised to the respondent, were cost-effective to send to experts around the world, excluded the need for data entry and provided experts with easy (real-time) access to the survey irrespective of location. Permission to undertake this study was granted by The University of Western Australia Human Research Ethics Committee.

Sample and Recruitment

A list of 280 international experts in the field of the arts or arts–health was compiled by obtaining the names and contact email addresses from various arts databases and websites (e.g. journals, reports, arts organisation, government departments, universities). A person was considered to be an expert if they met at least one of the following criteria: they had published an article in a refereed arts or arts–health journal; had written a published arts or arts–health report; were an arts or arts–health academic; or were a director, manager,

administrator or curator of a major arts organisation. A total of 280 experts (with email addresses) were identified and invited to participate in survey one in November 2009. Of the 123 experts who responded to survey one, 100 were still contactable via the same email address in May 2010 and were invited to participate in the second survey. A total of 57 experts completed the second survey. For both surveys, non-respondents were sent up to two reminder emails.

Survey Instruments

Survey one. The terminology and content of online survey one was pilot tested by a panel of 10 professionals in the field of the arts, arts–health, health or evaluation. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete and contained demographic items as well as questions about the concept of arts engagement. Specifically, respondents were asked, “when you think about the concept of arts engagement what words come to mind?” and “please list the types of activities or events related to your field of expertise that you consider to be examples of arts engagement activities”. Survey one respondents were asked to provide examples with enough detail to enable the creation of a list of typical arts engagement activities. In their examples, respondents were asked to specify both the type of activity (e.g. painting) and the method of engagement (e.g. make, create, design, view). Up to 15 activities were recorded per expert.

Survey two. The terminology and content of online survey two was pilot tested by the same panel of 10 professionals who reviewed survey one. Respondents were asked to rate a list of 108 activities in terms of the “amount of arts engagement” experienced by a person when they take part in these activities. The list of activities included the arts activities generated from survey one, and for comparison purposes, other activities that could also potentially have a positive effect on health and well-being (e.g. sports engagement, holidays, attending religious events). The list generated from survey one also contained some contentious arts activities, such as watching television or viewing a movie, and newer activities relating to the field of online, digital and electronic arts. The 10-point rating scale used in survey two ranged from 0 to 9, where “1” represented a low level of arts engagement and “9” represented a high level. Alternatively, respondents could decide that the listed activity was not an arts activity and in this case the activity was given a rating of zero. Survey two took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Analysis

The results of surveys one and two were analysed using SPSS for Windows (version 17) and NVivo (version 8). First, the 659 examples of arts engagement activities generated by survey one experts were coded thematically by art form and activity. Identified art forms and activities were then verified via a word frequency query in NVivo. Second, a descriptive analysis of survey two ratings was conducted to generate measures of central tendency (i.e. medians and means) and variation (i.e. standard deviation). Finally, a principal factor analysis with a Varimax rotation was performed to assess if there were any underlying patterns or constructs in the way respondents rated the 108 activities. A two-factor model was chosen because the first two factors accounted for the majority of the variance (eigenvalue A = 32.7, eigenvalue P = 18.7). A factor loading cut-off of 0.55 was employed.

Results

Survey one was completed by 123 experts, a response fraction of 44% (123 respondents/280 possible participants). Survey two was completed by 57 experts, a response fraction of 57% (57 respondents/100 possible participants). The original sample plus the demographic profile of respondents to surveys one and two is shown in Table 1. For both surveys, two-thirds of respondents were female and the majority were aged 40 years or over. Respondents were located in Australia, Europe, the USA and Canada and had expertise in a variety of art forms.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics.

Variable	Level	Original sample (%) (n = 280)	Survey one (%) (n = 123)	Survey two (%) (n = 57)
Area	Arts	79.3	63.4	64.9
	Arts and health	20.7	36.6	35.1
Gender	Male	45.8	33.1	36.4
	Female	54.2	66.9	63.6
Age group	29 years or less	11.1	11.1	14.6
	30 to 39	21.2	21.2	14.6
	40 to 49	24.2	24.2	20.8
	50 to 59	33.3	33.3	39.6
	60 years or over	10.1	10.1	10.4
Location	Australia	80.0	87.0	89.5
	Europe (including the UK)	10.4	9.8	7.0
	USA/Canada	9.6	3.2	3.5
Art form	Performing arts	20.7	20.3	17.5
	Visual arts, design and craft	32.5	21.1	22.8
	Literature	3.2	1.6	0.0
	Community and cultural festivals, fairs and events	7.1	7.3	3.5
	Health specific	19.3	34.1	36.8
	Multi-disciplinary	17.1	15.5	19.3

Art Forms

As guided by the literature (Australia Council, 2010; Commonwealth of Australia, 1975; National Endowment for the Arts, 2009; Windsor, 2005), five specific art forms were identified from respondents comments (Figure 1), these being:

- the performing arts (e.g. activities in the genre of music, sound art, dance, theatre, singing, film, etc.);
- the visual arts, design and craft (e.g. activities in the genre of animation, craft, drawing, fashion, interior design, jewellery, woodwork, metalwork, painting, photography, ceramics, public art, sculpture, textiles, etc.);
- literature (e.g. activities such as writing, reading, etc.);
- online, digital and electronic arts (e.g. activities relating to arts websites, blogs, digital art, electronic art, etc.); and
- community and cultural festivals, fairs and events.

Arts Activities and Level of Engagement

Of the 108 activities rated by the experts, 91 were given an arts engagement rating between 1 and 9, while 17 were designated as non-arts activities and received a median rating of zero.

The activities considered to be “non-arts” activities were:

- travelling to an arts event or venue (e.g. by car, bus, train, walking),
- viewing websites to obtain general information,
- gardening at home,
- cooking at home,
- visiting an aquarium,
- going on holiday,
- attending a religious event, activity or place of worship,
- attending a night club or bar to socialise and have fun,
- being a member of a sports organisation, society or club,
- sports-related philanthropy,
- watching sport on television,
- participating in sports-related voluntary work,
- participating in a game of sport,
- attending a live sports event as a spectator,
- online “chatting” via social networking sites or chat rooms,
- putting on makeup (e.g. before going to work, dinner, etc.), and
- attending a family gathering.

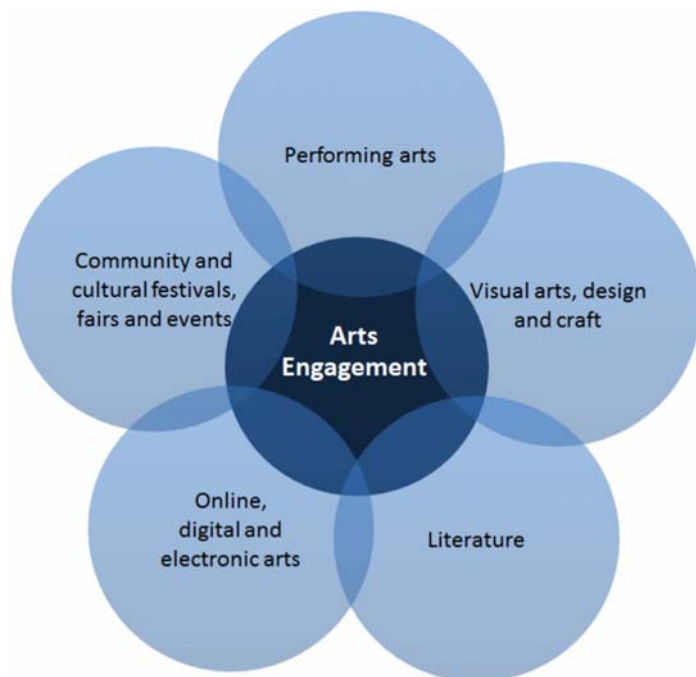


Figure 1. Arts Engagement as Represented by Five Art Forms.

The principal factor analysis revealed two dominant factors. The first factor contained “active” arts engagement activities that related to behaviours such as making, creating, writing and teaching art (Table 2). The second factor comprised more “passive” engagement activities that involved behaviours such as visiting, attending, listening, viewing, watching and discussing art (Table 3). The median engagement rating for active arts activities was eight, while the median rating for passive arts activities was six.

Table 2. Level of Engagement for “Active” Arts Activities.

Activity	<i>n</i>	Median	Mean	SD
<i>Performing arts</i>				
Participating in a live performing arts performance as a professional artist (i.e. actor, dancer, musician or singer)	57	9	7.7	2.9
Participating in a performing arts rehearsal to practice for a performance	56	9	7.4	2.6
Participating, as a professional artist, in a performing arts class, workshop or training program to learn or improve skills	57	9	7.4	3.0
Jamming, composing, recording, mixing music/songs as a professional artist	57	9	7.4	2.9
Writing a script for a film or play/theatre production	57	9	7.3	3.0
Directing, producing, choreographing or editing a performing arts film, production or performance	56	9	7.6	2.6
Participating in a live performing arts performance as an amateur artist (i.e. amateur actor, dancer, musician or singer)	57	8	7.1	2.8
Participating, as an amateur artist or member of the public, in a performing arts class, workshop or training program to learn or improve skills (e.g. dancing lessons, learning an instrument, singing, etc.)	57	8	7.1	2.7
Jamming, composing, recording, mixing music/songs as an amateur artist	57	8	7.0	2.8
Teaching or facilitating a performing arts class, workshop, training program	57	8	7.0	2.6
Participating in a performing arts event as a stage hand, technician, assistant, etc.	57	7	5.9	3.2
DJ-ing at a performing arts event	57	7	5.7	3.0
Making or designing the costumes, sets, lighting or backdrops for a performing arts event	57	7	6.4	2.9
Participating in the various performing arts activities or events for self-enjoyment, relaxation or self-reflection (e.g. dancing, learning an instrument, jamming, singing)	57	7	6.5	2.6
Attending an amateur performing arts concert as part of an audience e.g. at a school, community centre, etc.	57	6	5.5	2.5
Busking in a shopping mall, park, city street, festival, etc.	57	6	5.7	2.9
<i>Visual arts, design and craft</i>				
Creating or designing public/urban art for a public space (includes sculptures, paintings, murals, etc.)	55	9	7.5	2.6
Creating or designing a visual arts/design/craft artwork, as a professional artist, for an exhibition or as a commission, etc.	54	9	7.9	2.4
Creating or designing a visual arts/design/craft artwork, as a professional artist, for self-enjoyment, relaxation, self-reflection, etc.	55	9	7.7	2.4

(continued)

Table 2 – continued

Activity	<i>n</i>	Median	Mean	SD
Participating, as a professional artist, in a visual arts/design/craft class, workshop or training program to learn or improve skills	54	9	7.6	2.5
Creating or designing a visual arts/design/craft artwork, as an amateur artist or member of the public, for an exhibition, as a commission, etc.	55	8	7.2	2.5
Creating or designing a visual arts/design/craft artwork, as an amateur artist or member of the public, for self-enjoyment, relaxation, self-reflection, etc.	55	8	7.0	2.7
Participating, as an amateur artist or member of the public, in a visual arts/design/craft class, workshop or training program to learn or improve skills (e.g. painting lessons, knitting groups, craft groups, etc.)	56	8	6.6	2.9
Teaching or facilitating a visual arts/design/craft class, workshop, training program	56	8	7.5	2.1
Participating in the various visual arts/design/craft activities or events for self-enjoyment, relaxation or self-reflection	56	8	6.9	2.5
<i>Literature</i>				
Writing a book, poetry, essay, short story, etc. as a professional author	56	9	7.8	2.6
Writing a book, poetry, essay, short story, etc. as an amateur author or member of the public	56	8	7.2	2.5
Teaching or facilitating a literary arts class, workshop or training program	56	8	7.5	2.2
Participating, as a professional author, in a literary arts class, workshop or training program to learn or improve skills	56	8	7.5	2.4
Participating, as an amateur author or member of the public, in a literary arts class, workshop or training program to learn or improve skills	56	7	6.6	2.7
Participating in the various literary arts activities or events for self-enjoyment, relaxation or self-reflection	56	7	6.4	2.5
<i>Online, digital and electronic arts</i>				
Making an electronic, digital or online artwork, animation, video, film, music recording, etc.	55	9	7.2	2.7
Writing a digital story or blog	54	6	5.2	3.2
Completing online arts tutorials to learn about the arts or to obtain a skill	55	5	5.0	2.6
<i>Community and cultural festivals, fairs and events</i>				
Participating in a community festival/fair as a professional artist, performer, musician, etc.	54	8	7.1	2.6
Making artworks for a community event or procession, e.g. lanterns	54	7	5.8	3.1

(continued)

Table 2 – continued

Activity	<i>n</i>	Median	Mean	SD
Participating in a community festival/fair as an amateur artist, performer, musician, etc. or member of the general public	54	7	6.5	2.7
Participating in a cultural performance, traditional welcome, parade or ceremony	54	7	5.9	2.9
Participating in a community arts workshop to create murals, mosaic, etc.	54	7	6.4	2.8
Teaching or facilitating a community arts class, workshop or training program	54	7	6.6	2.8
Participating in the various community/cultural festivals, fairs or events for self-enjoyment, relaxation or self-reflection	53	6	5.6	2.7
<i>Multi-art form</i>				
Working in the arts as an artist	55	9	8.2	1.9
Teaching or facilitating an arts class, workshop or training program to improve or promote well-being/health	55	7	6.2	3.0
Making works of art as part of a workshop or therapy session to improve well-being/health (e.g. in a community, hospital or health care setting)	55	6	5.7	2.9
Making works of art, banners, posters, etc. as part of a workshop to promote well-being/health, e.g. fruit sculptures to promote healthy eating	55	6	5.0	3.2
Participating in an arts project/workshop as a result of a referral or “arts prescription” as practised in the UK	55	6	5.8	2.9
Participating in arts-related competitions	53	5	5.6	2.7

Overall, 16 of the 91 arts activities did not load sufficiently on either the active or passive factor (Table 4). As factor loadings are the correlations between the original activity variable and factors, these 16 activities did not correlate well with the active factor or the passive factor and thus may relate to other dimensions of arts engagement not captured by these two dominant factors. The 91 arts activities listed in Tables 2–4 were ordered by art form and from highest to lowest by median rating. Overall, professional arts participation or attending professional events scored higher than amateur participation or attending amateur events. Within the art form of the performing arts, respondents made a distinction between watching an arts house film at a cinema and watching a main stream film at a cinema (median = six vs. four, respectively). A rating distinction was also made by the experts in terms of television viewing. That is, watching an arts-related show, film or documentary on television was seen to impart a higher level of arts engagement than watching a mainstream show, film or documentary (median = six vs. three, respectively).

Discussion

A scientific approach is needed to elucidate key terminology and concepts that are central to understanding the relationship between the arts and health. Without proper parameters

Table 3. Level of Engagement for “Passive” Arts Activities.

Activity	<i>N</i>	Median	Mean	SD
<i>Performing arts</i>				
Watching an arts-related show, film or documentary on the television	57	6	5.3	2.3
Listening to a recording of the performing arts (e.g. music, singing) via a CD player, radio, web stream, iPod, etc.	57	5	5.1	2.5
<i>Visual arts, design and craft</i>				
Attending a professional visual arts/design/craft exhibition as part of an audience or spectator, e.g. art gallery, etc.	56	7	6.8	2.2
Attending an amateur visual arts/design/craft exhibition as part of an audience or spectator, e.g. at a school, community centre, etc.	56	6	5.6	2.5
Collecting/buying original works of art, e.g. paintings, sculpture, etc.	56	6	5.9	2.3
Viewing public/urban art in a public space	56	5	5.5	2.6
<i>Literature</i>				
Reading about the arts, art history, art theory, etc. in an arts-related book, journal, essay, online, etc.	56	7	6.1	2.3
Attending a book reading, book launch or author’s talk	56	6	5.4	2.4
Discussing a book, poetry, essay, short story, etc. as part of a book club or reading group	56	6	5.6	2.6
Buying a paperback, hard cover or electronic book in a store or online	55	5	4.0	2.8
Reading a book, poetry, essay, short story, etc. for self-enjoyment, relaxation, self-reflection, etc.	56	5	5.5	2.4
Going to a library to borrow a book, CD, DVD, etc.	56	4	3.8	2.9
<i>Online, digital and electronic arts</i>				
Viewing or listening to a visual artwork, performance or literary work via a website, web stream, podcast, etc.	55	5	5.2	2.4
Participating in an online forum after attending/participating in an arts event	55	5	5.2	2.5
Participating in an online forum to obtain or share arts-related information	55	5	5.1	2.5
<i>Community and cultural festivals, fairs and events</i>				
Attending a community arts festival or fair	54	6	5.0	2.5
Attending a cultural performance or ceremony	54	6	5.7	2.6
<i>Multi-art form</i>				
Conducting arts-related research	54	8	6.4	2.8
Visiting an artist studio	55	7	6.1	2.6
Visiting an art gallery	55	7	6.6	2.2

(continued)

Table 3 – *continued*

Activity	<i>N</i>	Median	Mean	SD
Working in the arts as an arts administrator, academic, etc.	55	7	6.8	2.4
Being a member of an arts organisation, society, club, etc.	54	7	5.9	2.6
Attending an artist talk or lecture	54	7	6.4	2.1
Attending an arts-related conference or symposium	54	7	6.6	2.2
Visiting a museum	54	6	5.8	2.6
Arts-related philanthropy	54	6	5.4	2.9
Attending an art market	53	6	5.2	2.6
Attending an arts-related charity event	54	5	4.7	2.7

Table 4. Level of Engagement for “Other” Arts Activities.

Activity	<i>n</i>	Median	Mean	SD
<i>Performing arts</i>				
Attending a professional performing arts performance or concert as part of an audience	57	7	6.8	2.2
Watching an art house film at a cinema	57	6	5.7	2.2
Watching a recording of the performing arts (e.g. dance performance) via a web stream, podcast, DVD, etc.	56	5	4.7	2.4
Watching buskers/street performers perform	57	4	3.9	2.7
Watching a main stream film at a cinema	56	4	3.7	2.5
Watching a main stream show, film or documentary on the television	57	3	3.7	2.5
Making a home movie with friends/family	57	3	3.6	2.8
Buying a performing arts-related CD, DVD or MP3 in a store or online	57	3	3.5	2.7
Compiling a MP3 music play list	57	2	2.7	2.3
<i>Online, digital and electronic arts</i>				
Viewing arts websites to obtain arts-related information	52	6	5.7	2.2
Creating/designing a website	55	6	5.0	3.1
Participating in the various online/computer/electronic arts activities or events for self-enjoyment, relaxation or self-reflection	55	5	4.9	2.7
Downloading online movies, music, videos	55	1	1.5	1.7
<i>Multi-art form</i>				
Organising or managing arts-related projects, events and performances	55	8	6.4	3.0
Completing formal arts training at a university, community college, etc.	55	8	7.6	2.0
Participating in arts-related voluntary work	54	6	5.9	2.4

the concept of arts engagement cannot be validly and reliably measured and the association between arts engagement and health cannot be properly investigated. Therefore, the aim of this study was to clarify key terminology by developing a definition of arts engagement via current art forms, activities and level of engagement.

Overall, three of the five art forms suggested in this article (i.e. the performing arts; visual arts, design & craft and literature) were found to be similar to the art forms defined in the Australian Council for the Arts act (Commonwealth of Australia, 1975). Based on study findings, it was considered important to expand this definition to include “online, digital & electronic arts” and “community and cultural festivals, fairs & events”. Therefore, in this study, arts engagement was defined in terms of five art forms that operate independently but also collaborate, communicate and intersect in their arts practice.

Windsor (2005) defined arts engagement in terms of a list of 41 arts activities. In this study, expert opinion resulted in the formation of a list of 91 arts activities. A principal factor analysis was performed to assess if there were any underlying patterns or constructs in the way respondents rated the activities. Overall, 75 of the 91 arts activities were explained by two dominant underlying factors, these being active and passive engagement. In the literature, active and passive engagement are seen as two poles of the activity dimension, where active experience is mainly associated with “physical” presence, and passive experience with a more “mental” presence (Australia Council, 2010; Nakatsu, Rauterberg & Vorderer, 2005). Our findings suggest that regardless of art form, active arts activities (e.g. making, creating, writing) provide higher levels of engagement compared to more passive activities (e.g. visiting, attending, listening).

In general, professional artists were considered to be more engaged than amateur artists, possibly due to variation in arts-related skill, knowledge, familiarity and understanding. On average, respondents also rated attending professional arts events higher than attending amateur arts events, which might reflect the expectation that professional arts events are more expertly crafted, performed by skilled artists and more artistically proficient than an amateur event. Although previous studies have acknowledged the use of online, digital or electronic media to access the arts (National Endowment for the Arts, 2009; Windsor, 2005), few have highlighted its importance as an art form in its own right. Ten activities relating to the emerging art form of online, digital and electronic arts were identified in this study. Making an electronic, digital or online art work was rated highly by the experts in terms of level of arts engagement. Writing a digital story, blog or creating a website was considered to impart a medium level of arts engagement, as was viewing an arts related website to obtain arts information. Downloading movies, music and videos was considered by the experts to provide a low level of arts engagement.

Within the performing arts, respondents indicated that watching an arts house film imparted a higher level of engagement compared to watching a main stream film. Similarly, respondents rated watching an arts related show, film or documentary on television higher than watching a main stream show, film or documentary. This rating distinction indicates that when conducting arts surveys it may not be enough to ask respondents if they “attend the cinema” or if they “watch television”; instead, it is important to ask people what they watch and if the show, film or documentary directly relates to the arts.

Overall, 17 of the 108 activities rated in this study were defined as non-arts activities by the experts. Similar to the 2009 NEA study, some of these items could be classified as social or leisure activities (e.g. online chatting via social networking sites, going on holiday, sport engagement, religious activities). As these social or leisure activities could

also have an impact on health and well-being, future population-based studies should control for engagement in these activities to ensure that they do not confound or modify the effect of arts engagement on health.

To develop a definition of arts engagement, experts from a variety of art forms were consulted. As a result, the strengths of this study, were that our definition of arts engagement, were (1) guided by a scientific approach and (2) directed by the informed opinion of a group of experts. This, however, could also be seen as a limitation due to the subjective dimension of the identification and rating of arts engagement. Therefore, it is possible that if a different group of respondents were surveyed (e.g. the general public, arts students, hospital patients etc.), that a different list of art forms, activities and measures of engagement would have been generated. It is the authors' opinion that the views of experts in the field of the arts or arts–health is a suitable place to start when defining the arts and that the appropriateness of the art forms, activities and measures of engagement provided in this study will be assessed once they are used in the context of arts and health research. Another limitation of this study was the level of non-response to the two online surveys. However, online surveys commonly achieve response fractions between 30% and 40%, therefore, the response to our surveys was reasonable for this type of method (44% for survey one and 57% for survey two) (Cook, Heath & Thompson, 2000; Kaplowitz, Hadlock & Levine, 2004).

Given that five art forms were identified in this study, future studies could look at patterns of engagement to see if those who engage in the arts have a narrow focus (i.e. engage in only one art form) or a more broad focus (i.e. engage in several art forms). As there is a growing interest in understanding the contribution of different art forms in population health, research should be conducted to look at both the individual effect and the cumulative effects of engaging in the five art forms on health and well-being. Future studies could also look at the relationship between active and passive activities to see if those who make art are also more likely to attend arts events and also to see if professional artists have a different method of engagement to amateur artists. Based on Dutton's definition of the arts via a list of twelve characteristics (Dutton, 2006), it would also be informative to look at differences in level of engagement based on skill, pleasure, representation, emotional saturation, intellectual challenge and intention, especially between professional and amateur artist.

In conclusion, it was postulated that the clarification of art forms and a comprehensive list of activities would be useful to those conducting studies in the field of the arts or arts–health, especially those developing population based surveys, while a method for measuring the extent of engagement would be useful to those investigating the relationship between arts engagement and health. By clarifying key terminology within the arts and health nexus, it was anticipated that this article could help facilitate thought and communication about the concept of arts engagement. This article has explored the definition of arts engagement in terms of current art forms, activities and level of engagement. The definition was collaboratively developed via the views and ratings of experts. Although it is acknowledged that the arts are continuously evolving and that the art forms and activities identified in this paper will, in time, need to be updated and refined, for now, this article provides a clarification of art forms and activities that can be utilised by those developing population-based surveys and gives direction as to which activities should be utilised when calculating a prevalence of arts engagement or quantifying engagement in the arts.

Acknowledgements

This study was funded via a Western Australian Health Promotion Foundation (Healthway) Research Starter Grant. Christina Davies is a recipient of a Healthway Health Promotion Research Training Scholarship.

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