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Social Factors in Cultural Participation

Social Factors in Cultural Participation is a series of four factsheets based on the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) 2019. The series builds on *Widening the Lens: Social inequality and arts participation* (2023) through detailed analyses of key topics using statistical techniques.

Widening the Lens considered the complex and intersecting nature of the social factors that inform our understandings of 'class'. These factsheets sit within the context of this understanding, while conducting a focused analysis of specific relationships that can be observed with the survey data.

The series is produced through a partnership between Creative Australia, RMIT University and the University of Canberra's News and Media Research Centre.

Factsheet 2:

Gender, Social Status and Cultural Attendance

Headline findings

- Women are more likely to attend cultural venues and events compared to men (68% compared to 59%).
- Education, class and marital status affect cultural attendance differently for men and women.
- Education has a stronger impact on cultural attendance among men than women. Men with no post-school qualification are the least likely to attend, whereas men with a university qualification are the most likely to attend among both men and women.
- The association between class and attendance also depends on gender. Among those who identify as lower, working, or lower middle-class, women are more likely to attend cultural venues and events than men. In contrast, there is no gender difference in cultural attendance among those who identify as middle or upper-class.
- There is no gender difference in cultural attendance among those who are married. There is a wide gender gap among those who are divorced, separated, or widowed, with women in this group much more likely to attend cultural venues and events than men. Those who have never married are the most likely to attend among both genders.
- Among couples, employment status does not affect women's cultural attendance, but the employment status of women's spouses does.
- Note that the 2019 AuSSA only provided two options for participants' gender identity, male and female, which limits the scope of this analysis. Later AuSSA surveys have added additional options for answering this question.

What roles do gender and social status play in the likelihood that Australians participate in arts and culture?

How do the effects of education, self-identified class, and marital status on attendance at cultural venues and events vary according to gender?

Studies on gender and cultural attendance consistently find that women have higher rates of participation than men,¹ including in Australia.² This difference is potentially related to arts engagement in childhood, with most studies finding that girls have higher rates of extracurricular arts education.

There are many theories for these gender differences in children's and adult participation, with gendered family and household responsibilities in heteronormative families playing a key function.³ Studies have proposed a link between women's cultural participation and their traditional role in supporting children's learning, such as through book reading to children and support with homework.⁴ Another theory, for which there are mixed results, suggests that cultural knowledge plays a role in attracting educated partners. One longitudinal study of US women from the 1960s found little evidence in support of this,⁵ although a more recent study in Japan found in favour.⁶ This suggests that the relationship of culture in partnering is variable across societies. Others have analysed the social norms of workplaces, arguing that valuing or not valuing culture also plays a role in the gender gap in cultural participation.⁷ While gender differences have historically influenced participation in arts-based activities, societal shifts and changing perceptions of gender roles are gradually altering these patterns.⁸

We found that education, class and marital status affect men and women differently in their cultural activities. These findings provide new insights into gender differences in adult cultural participation in Australia.

1 Christin A 2012, 'Gender and Highbrow Cultural Participation in the United States', *Poetics* 40:5.

2 See: ABS 2019, Participation in Selected Cultural Activities, 2017–18. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/participation-selected-cultural-activities/latest-release>.

3 Tepper SJ and Ivey BJ 2007, *Engaging Art: The Next Great Transformation of America's Cultural Life*.

4 Silva E B and Le Roux B 2011, 'Cultural Capital of Couples: Tensions of elective affinities', *Poetics* 39:6.

5 DiMaggio P and Mohr J 1985, 'Cultural Capital, Educational Attainment and Marital Selection', *American Journal of Sociology* 90:6.

6 Kataoka E 2016, 'The Effect of Cultural Capital on Status Attainment: Educational, Occupational and Marriage Market Returns', *Komazawa Journal of Sociology*, 48.

7 Christin A 2012, 'Gender and Highbrow Cultural Participation in the United States', *Poetics* 40:5.

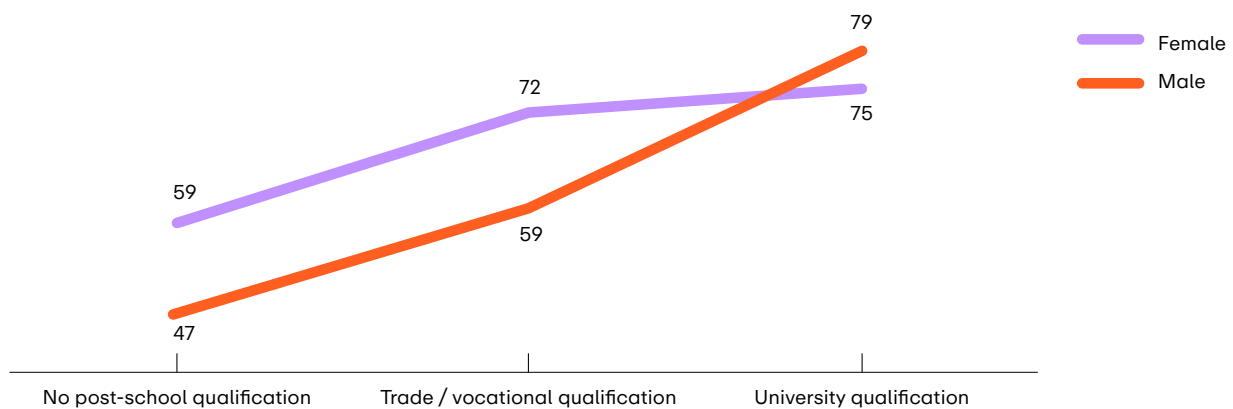
8 Silva EB 2005, 'Gender, Home and Family in Cultural Capital Theory', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 56.

Analysis 1: Education and gender

Education is one of the key factors influencing attendance at arts and cultural events.⁹ The aim of Analysis 1 was to examine how the relationship between education and attendance varies based on gender.

Figure 1 shows a positive relationship between education and cultural attendance for both men and women. However, this relationship is stronger among men. Men with no post-school qualification are the least likely to attend, and men with a university qualification are the most likely to attend (amongst all men and women). By contrast, the association between education level and attendance is weaker for women (purple line), with there being almost no difference in attendance between women with trade versus university qualifications.

Figure 1: Education and gender in attendance at arts and cultural events (%)



According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Cultural Participation Survey (2012), which collected gender breakdowns of data on children’s and teenagers’ attendance at selected cultural venues and events, the overall rate of attendance at cultural venues and events was higher for females (74%) than males (68%).¹⁰

Previous research supports the idea that greater rates of childhood participation in arts activities among females contributes to their higher rates of adult participation.¹¹ The stronger effect of education on men found here suggests that men may be more likely to acquire tastes later in life through education.¹²

⁹ DiMaggio P and Bryson B 1995, *Americans’ Attitudes towards Cultural Authority and Cultural Diversity: Culture Wars, Social Closure, or Multiple Dimensions?* General Social Survey Topical Reports Series No 27; Bone JK, Bu F, Fluharty ME, Paul E, Sonke JK and Fancourt D 2021, ‘Who Engages in the Arts in the United States? A comparison of several types of engagement using data from the General Social Survey’ *BMC Public Health* 21:1.

¹⁰ See ABS 2012, *Children’s Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, 2012*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/childrens-participation-cultural-and-leisure-activities-australia/latest-release#cultural-activities>. Note, more recent ABS data on children’s cultural participation and attendance does not include gender breakdowns, meaning we may not be able to track these into the future. This 2012 data does however provide some insights into earlier participation patterns of a cohort who would now be young adults (and so within the scope of the AuSSA survey group).

¹¹ Christin A 2012, ‘Gender and Highbrow Cultural Participation in the United States’, *Poetics* 40:5.

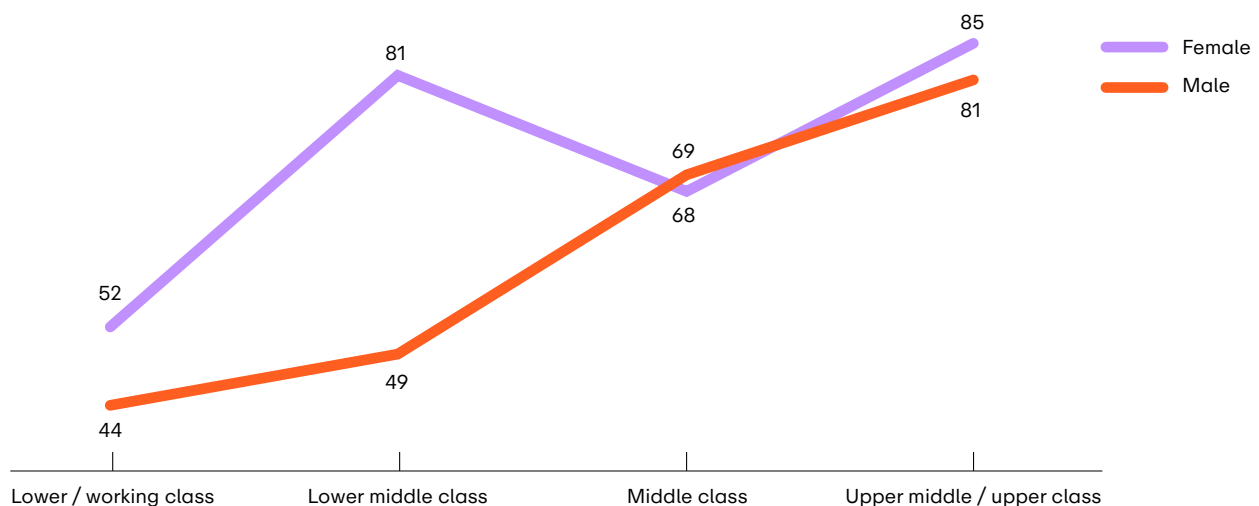
¹² Reeves A 2015, ‘Music’s a Family Thing: Cultural Socialisation and Parental Transference’. *Cultural Sociology*, 9:4.

Analysis 2: Class and gender

Social class is another well-known predictor of attendance at cultural venues and events.¹³ Analysis 2 explores how the impact of self-identified class on attendance differs between males and females.

Figure 2 shows that among the lower/working and lower middle classes, women were more likely to attend than men. The largest gender gap was in the lower middle class, with 81% women attending in the past year, compared with only 49% of men. This gender gap vanishes among middle and upper class respondents.

Figure 2. Self-identified class and gender in attendance at arts and cultural events (%)



Among self-identified lower middle class respondents, there was a higher proportion of women who had never married, which may explain the higher attendance among this group.

Another potential explanation is that women who identify as lower/middle class may be more likely to work in sectors associated with higher valuing of culture, such as education. Previous research suggests that cultural knowledge is more highly valued in occupations that employ more women, while conversely male-dominated occupations disregard the value of cultural knowledge in favour of knowledge about sports and business.¹⁴

Another factor to consider is that women respondents with professional occupations were more likely to identify as 'lower middle class' relative to men with professional occupations (in other words, in commensurate roles). This may also explain the higher cultural attendance of women in the lower middle class group.

¹³ Chan TW 2010, *Social Status and Cultural Consumption*.

¹⁴ Lizardo O 2006, 'The Puzzle of Women's "Highbrow" Culture Consumption: Integrating gender and work into Bourdieu's class theory of taste', *Poetics* 34.1. Christin A 2012, 'Gender and Highbrow Cultural Participation in the United States', *Poetics* 40:5.

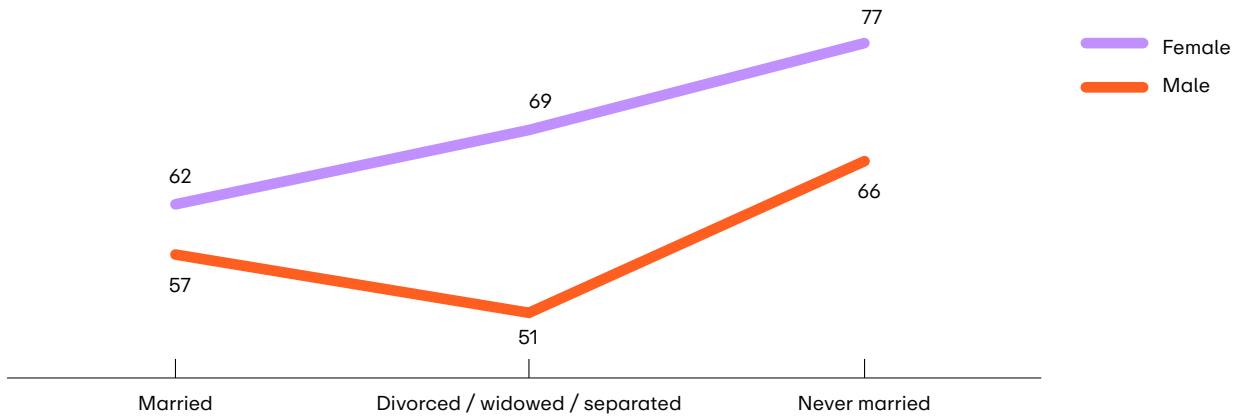
Analysis 3: Marital status

Marital status has also been associated with likelihood of attendance in previous research.¹⁵ Here, we investigated whether this association depends on gender.

Note, this analysis may include data on same-sex marriages; however, the design of the AuSSA survey doesn't enable us to isolate gender from these findings, eg to consider the impacts of marital status upon women who are married to women, or upon men who have been married to men but are now divorced. While heterosexual relationships are statistically likely to be the most common, they should not be assumed in the data below.

Figure 3 shows that, for both men and women, those who have never married are the most likely to attend. However, being married was associated with the lowest attendance for women, while being divorced, separated, or widowed was associated with the lowest attendance for men. The largest gender gap was among those who are divorced/separated/widowed, with women in this group being much more likely to participate in cultural activities than men. The smallest gender gap was among those who are married.

Figure 3. Marital status and gender interaction in attendance at arts and cultural events (%)



¹⁵ Upright CB 2004, 'Social Capital and Cultural Participation'. *Poetics*, 32:2.

Upright has shown that, in the context of heterosexual married couples, a woman’s early art socialisation and educational level has an important additional effect on the cultural participation of the man, while the opposite relationship (from man to woman) is less pronounced.¹⁶ Here, however, we found that the gap in cultural attendance between people who were married and people who had never married was much wider for women compared to men.

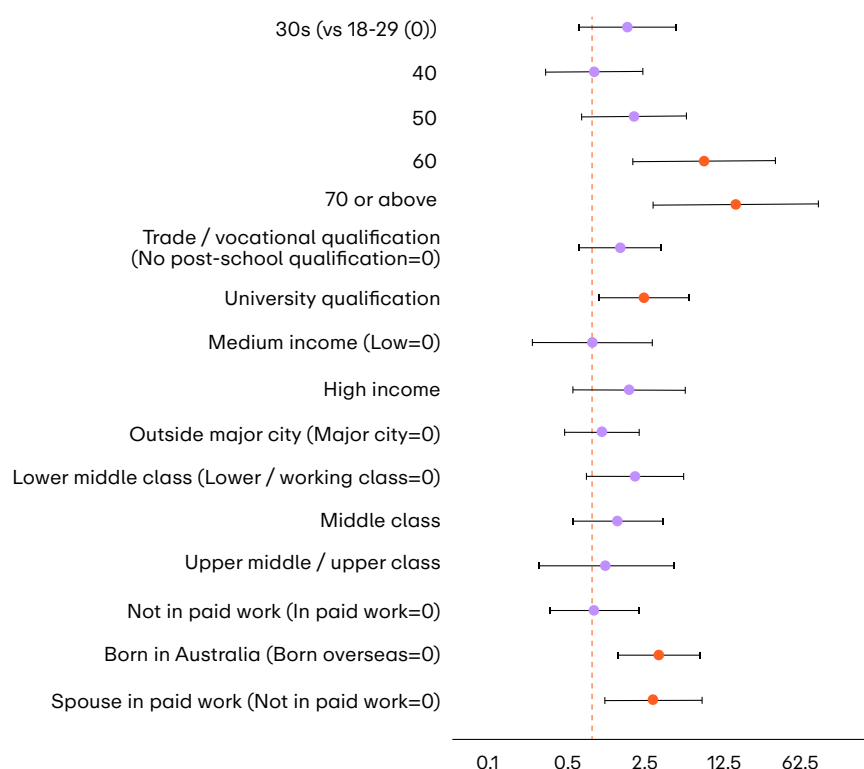
It appears that men and women respond differently to separation or divorce, with rates of attendance increasing for women but decreasing for men, compared to those who are married. Possible explanations for the gender gap among those who are divorced/widowed/separated include differences in social network processes, gender norms, and age.

Analysis 4: Gender differences among those who are married

We also ran two logistic regression analyses using a subsample of respondents who were married. These were to identify gender differences in the socio-demographic predictors of cultural attendance among married people. Education significantly increases the probability of attending for both married women and men; university degree holders are more likely to participate in cultural activities, which is in line with existing studies.¹⁷ Ateca-Amestoy and Ugidos also found that working part-time as opposed to full-time has a significant effect on cultural participation of couples, decreasing their attendance when it is the woman who works part-time.¹⁸

Our data shows that for both men and women, employment status does not affect their cultural attendance. However, for women, spouse's employment status is positively associated with their cultural attendance. In contrast, spouse’s employment status is not an important predictor of cultural attendance among men.

Figure 4: Factors associated with married women’s cultural attendance



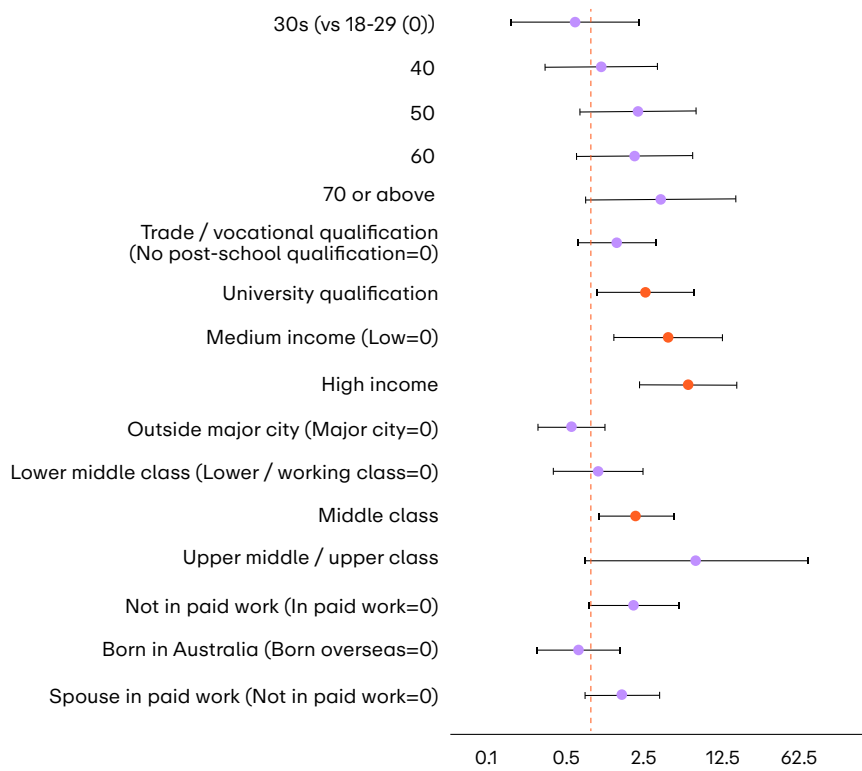
Note. Logistic regression results (dependent variable = attendance). Odds ratio and confidence interval for each factor, with significant variables indicated in colour (p < 0.05). If the confidence interval includes or crosses 1 (the dotted vertical line), the variable is not significant. Variables in orange represent a positive likelihood. All variables are categorical.

16 Upright CB 2004, 'Social Capital and Cultural Participation', *Poetics*, 32:2.

17 Ateca-Amestoy V and Ugidos A 2021, 'Gender Differences in Cultural and Sports Activities Attendance: An intra-couple analysis', *Applied Economics*, 53:55.

18 As above.

Figure 5: Factors associated with married men’s cultural attendance



Note. Logistic regression results (dependent variable = attendance). Odds ratio and confidence interval for each factor, with significant variables indicated in colour ($p < 0.05$). If the confidence interval includes or crosses 1 (the dotted vertical line), the variable is not significant. Variables in orange represent a positive likelihood. All variables are categorical.

Appendix

Key questions in the survey

Attend: Have you done any of the following activities in the last year? Went to: live music (e.g. music or community venue, concert, club, pub), art exhibition, performance, festival or other arts venue or event?

Class: Most people see themselves as belonging to a particular class. Please tell me which social class you would say you belong to? Lower class; Working class; Lower middle class; Middle class; Upper middle class; Upper class.

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About the factsheets

The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) is an annual national survey, which generates Australia's main source of data for the study of the social attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of Australians. In 2019, the topic for AuSSA was social inequality. The survey asked a range of questions designed to explore respondents' views on the overall fairness of society and their place within it. Creative Australia (then called the Australia Council for the Arts) added four questions to the 2019 AuSSA, aligned with those from the National Arts Participation Survey. Based on this dataset, the Creative Australia published *Widening the Lens: Social inequality and arts participation* report in July 2023. To explore further insights from ACSPRI's 2019 AuSSA on how income, education and occupation impact cultural participation, researchers from the University of Canberra and RMIT are collaborating to produce a series of fact sheets in 2023–24. This is the second of the series. For details on the methodology and other findings, please refer to the [main](#) report.

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