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## ARTICLES

# Artists as Amateurs and Volunteers

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*Scholarship on U.S. arts labor has generally focused only on professional artists. However, a large portion of the arts labor force is unpaid. This article takes the first steps toward characterizing both groups simultaneously and uses General Social Survey data (Davis, Smith, and Marsden, 1999) to build probabilistic portraits of active arts participation. Significant predictors of arts activity are race, region of residence, age, attendance at arts events, political ideology, gender, income, and education. These results have implications for cultural policy and future research on arts activity, especially that focusing on amateurs.*

SCHOLARSHIP on the arts labor force has generally focused only on professional artists. The reasons for this are clear. First, data on arts amateurs are relatively sparse. Most studies of artists use figures compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which tracks artists' paid activities just as it does for other workers (see, for example, the National Endowment for the Arts [NEA] research series on artist employment, 1987, 1995). Second, descriptions of the labor supply in any profession generally feature wage as the central explanatory argument.

But compensation in the arts is often largely nonpecuniary. For example, a small body of research on the arts describes the motives for production in terms such as "labor of love" (Friedson, 1990) and "inner drive" (Jeffri and Throsby, 1994). Further, the arts offer an employment lifestyle that is attractive above and beyond monetary rewards (Menger, 1999). The wage differentials following these nonpecuniary benefits are presumably responsible for the fact that professional artists earn far less, on average, than workers of comparable educational attainment (Alper and others, 1996). For example, Jeffri, Hosie, and Greenblatt (1997) found that in 1986, although over

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95 percent of artists had some college education, 62 percent had gross annual household incomes below \$15,000.

Obviously, these low monetary rewards (but high nonmonetary rewards) create an incentive to produce the arts in an amateur capacity. Therefore, a true understanding of arts human resources should be based on the activities of both professionals and amateurs.

Amateur and semiamateur active arts participation appears pervasive. For example, in 1991 nearly 40 percent of symphony orchestras in the United States had annual budgets below \$700,000 (Wolf Organization, Inc., 1992). These orchestras maintained a mean of sixty-one regular musicians, of which on average only five were salaried. And the mean salary for these five players was just \$150 per week. In addition, many self-declared professionals would probably better be classified as amateurs. According to Wassall and Alper (1992), only 24 percent of artists in the 1990 U.S. census are able to make a living without holding nonartistic jobs. In a similar finding based on current population survey data, Alper and Wassall (2000) found that 39 percent of professional artists indicate that their arts participation constitutes a second job. Galligan and Alper (2000) report that except for architects and photographers, more than 20 percent of artists hold at least two jobs at any one time. Given these facts, it seems there is considerable fluidity of just what separates an amateur from a professional, complicating the task of measuring and studying one group in isolation.

Unpaid artistic activities in the United States have received relatively little study. Rare exceptions to this are papers that discuss the topic tangentially to some other research question (for example, DiMaggio and Ostrower, 1990) or research, such as that conducted by the NEA (1987, 1995) using the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, that assesses some amateur activity alongside passive forms of arts consumption. Activities such as volunteering for nonprofits in general have received a bit more scholarly attention (see Smith, 1994; Brown, 1999), with some work even focusing on nonartist volunteers for arts organizations (Colonna, 1995).

Two published studies on arts amateurs have focused on activity in Europe. Hutchison and Feist (1991) provide a broad view of unpaid arts labor in the United Kingdom; Donnat (1996) performs a similar analysis for France. Although the scope of these studies is quite wide, neither relies on modeling to net out the impacts of individual variables on amateur participation. Some work on this topic is currently under way in the United States but generally does not focus on economics. For example, the Chicago Center for Arts Policy at Columbia College is undertaking a major multiyear study on the social impacts of amateur arts participation. Rather than looking at either the determinants of unpaid arts activity or the economic impact of this activity, however, this is an ethnographic study designed to apprehend the personal and societal benefits of amateur participation.

This article begins an econometric exploration of the characteristics of the entire arts labor force in the United States, including both amateurs and professionals. Note that my use of the term *active participation* throughout this article is intended to contrast with *participation*, which includes passive activities such as attending arts events as a spectator. See, for example, DiMaggio and Ostrower (1990). In general, I refer to passive activities in this article as *attendance*.

The rest of this article is organized in four parts. The next section begins by tightening up the language on arts activity. Specifically, I discuss the use of the terms *amateur* and *professional* and attempt to distinguish between amateurs and the volunteers that characterize unpaid human resources in much of the rest of the nonprofit economy. Following this, I explore several hypotheses about what motivates or inhibits active arts participation and present data and models to test these hypotheses. Next, I present empirical results, compare them with earlier findings, and interpret them vis-à-vis simple policy simulations. I close with conclusions and suggestions for future research.

### Professionals, Amateurs, and Volunteers

The distinction between amateurs and professionals occasionally causes discomfort in nonprofit circles, as if amateur designation carried some sort of pejorative connotation. Until quite recently, nothing could be further from the truth in the case of the classical arts, in which amateur activity was, if anything, a more respectable pursuit than professional arts endeavors (McCarthy, Brooks, Lowell, and Zakaras, 2001). More to the point for today's world, the only technical distinction between amateurs and professionals is that of financial compensation. In this article, the difference between paid and unpaid arts activity has no normative content.

A more nuanced distinction exists between the terms *amateurs* and *volunteers*. The nonprofit management literature provides relatively little guidance on this point. Before concluding that amateurs and volunteers are functionally equivalent, however, we find a bit of help in the economics literature. For example, Clotfelter (1999) argues that volunteering is a special case of amateur activity, which also includes work for service organizations (such as VISTA or AmeriCorps) and service learning in schools.

More intriguing is the insight we can gain from the economics research into altruism. For example, Andreoni (1989) defines “warm glow giving” as charitable donations to others—often complete strangers—for reasons of personal satisfaction from the act of giving itself. Another strain of the literature (Kingma, 1989; Kingma and McClelland, 1995) discusses the related concept of “impure altruism” in which the giver receives a disproportionate share of the gift's direct benefits, such as in the case of public radio. I would hold that

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this distinction between “warm glow” and more tangible personal benefits from charitable activity has parallels in donations of time. Specifically, it seems sensible to suggest that although volunteering is “warm-glow” service, amateur activity—especially in the arts—provides direct benefits that the amateur him- or herself consumes almost entirely.

## Hypotheses, Models, and Data

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*Previous research indicates that volunteering is significantly affected by educational attainment, age, marital status, race, gender, as well as religion and region of residence*

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What affects active arts participation? To begin with, we might suspect a role for policy variables such as education, income, and attendance at arts events. Research on professional artists indicates that the average level of education for this group is significantly above the national average (Alper and others, 1996). Is it legitimate to assume the same for those who participate in the arts as amateurs? One could argue that education might increase the personal benefits of arts participation through the development of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1984) at the individual level. Hence, the direct relationship of higher education levels with this participation would be positive.

Indirectly, education should also affect active arts participation by way of income. The separate impact of income is uncertain, however. Given that amateur arts activity occupies time, it will be a function of the way people substitute money for leisure. Although an increased wage creates an incentive to work more (and thus participate less in time-intensive leisure activities such as the amateur arts), higher income might, alternatively, make time spent on the amateur arts more affordable.

The arts policy literature might lead us to suspect a relationship between attendance and active arts participation (for example, Bergonzi and Smith, 1994). Specifically, it makes sense that attending arts events should increase cultural human capital (as in the case of education) and thus result in higher rates of participation. Obviously, the case could also be made that active participation would lead to higher attendance rates, creating a situation in which each variable simultaneously affects the other. For this reason, readers should not view the estimated relationship between attendance and participation as containing much information about causality, only the strength of association between the two variables.

In testing these hypothesized relationships, we might like to control a number of variables. Previous research indicates that volunteering is significantly affected by educational attainment (Auslander and Litwin 1988), age (Florin, Jones, and Wandersman, 1986), marital status (Palisi and Korn, 1989), race (Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1986), gender (Curtis, Grabb, and Baer, 1992), as well as religion and region of residence (Brooks and Lewis, 2001). I also control for political ideology on the notion that attitudes about the arts might covary

with political ideology. A model to test the determinants of amateur arts participation is then

$$y = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ EDUCATION} + \beta_2 \text{ INCOME} + \beta_3 \text{ ATTENDANCE} + X\gamma + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where  $X$  is the vector of controls outlined above and  $y$  is a measure of participation. Participation can be measured as a binary choice, and I estimate equation (1) using a logit (logistical regression) specification.

To fit equation (1), I use the General Social Survey (GSS) data collected in 1998. The GSS, which is administered by the National Opinion Research Center (Davis, Smith, and Marsden, 1999), is designed to provide a sample of responses by adult interviewees to different subsets of about four thousand questions. The sample pool employed here, which includes only those interviewees who gave responses to the questions about arts participation, is 886. Table 1 summarizes these data.

The GSS data do not separate professional artists from amateurs. (One could parse the data using occupation codes, but this would not address the problems discussed earlier of multiple jobholding.) Thus, arts participation in general is not a proxy for amateur participation. However, given that approximately 0.8 percent of adults over age eighteen should probably legitimately be considered professional artists (Alper and others, 1996; *Economic Report of the President*, 1999) whereas about 42 percent of the adult population participates in the arts in the GSS data, we can estimate that at least 98 percent of those who actively participate do so as amateurs. Thus, my results should be viewed as reflecting the propensity to produce the arts in all capacities, *especially* as amateurs.

## Results and Discussion

Table 2 gives the regression estimates for equation (1).

Turning first to the central hypotheses, we can see that the estimates in Table 2 support them. As expected, education and attendance at arts events associate positively with active participation. Income, on the other hand, associates negatively with participation. This suggests, perhaps somewhat provocatively, that higher wages lead paid work to crowd out the time-intensive leisure activities such as amateur arts participation. This is consistent with other research on the subject (for example, McCarthy, Brooks, Lowell, and Zakaras, 2001).

Several of the coefficients on the control variables are significant. First, men are less likely to participate than women, and age drives down participation. Second, whites are more likely to participate than nonwhites. Third, residents of the East Coast and southern states are

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Table 1. GSS Data to Estimate the Determinants of Amateur Arts Participation

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean (or Proportion of Observations Where Variable = 1)</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
<i>Dependent Variable</i>						
Arts <sup>a</sup>	1 = Respondent has participated in the arts in the past year, 0 = Otherwise	0.42			0	1
<i>Policy Variables</i>						
Education	Respondent's completed years of formal education	13.23	13	2.95	0	20
Income <sup>b</sup>	1 = Respondent earns over \$60,000 per year, 0 = otherwise	\$30,008	\$23,750	\$22,896	\$500	\$110,000
Attend	1 = Respondent attended an arts event (visited a museum or attended a concert, theater, or dance performance) in the past year, 0 = Respondent did not attend an arts event	0.50			0	1
<i>Control Variables</i>						
Male	1 = Respondent is male, 0 = Respondent is female	0.45			0	1
Age	Respondent's age at the time of the survey	45.56	43	17.04	18	89
Married	1 = Respondent is married, 0 = Respondent is not married	0.47			0	1
White <sup>c</sup>	1 = Respondent is white, 0 = Otherwise	0.79			0	1
East <sup>d</sup>	1 = Residence on U.S. East Coast, 0 = otherwise	0.21			0	1
Midwest <sup>d</sup>	1 = Residence in midwest states, 0 = Otherwise	0.24			0	1
South <sup>d</sup>	1 = Residence in southern states, 0 = Otherwise	0.25			0	1
Liberal <sup>e</sup>	1 = Respondent describes self as "liberal" or "extremely liberal," 0 = Otherwise	0.16			0	1
Conservative <sup>e</sup>	1 = Respondent describes self as "conservative" or "extremely conservative," 0 = Otherwise	0.19			0	1
Christian	1 = Respondent is a Christian, 0 = Respondent is not a Christian	0.81			0	1

<sup>a</sup>The variable *Arts* was constructed from two separate variables in the GSS: *Makeart*, which asks whether the respondent has made arts or craft objects over the past year, and *Perform*, which asks whether the respondent has taken part in a music, dance, or theatrical performance during the past year.

<sup>b</sup>The GSS codes income data by category. The data reported here use the midpoints for each category.

<sup>c</sup>Reference group is nonwhite.

<sup>d</sup>Reference group is residence in western states. These regions match the U.S. census definitions (<http://www.census.gov>).

<sup>e</sup>Reference group is "moderate."

**Table 2. Logit Results: Predictions of the Likelihood of Arts Participation**

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>
Education	0.0552*	0.0314
Income	-8.62E-06**	3.74E-06
Attend	0.8145***	0.1567
Male	-0.3083**	0.1525
Age	-0.0132**	0.0061
Married	0.0556	0.1527
White	0.8872***	0.1918
East	-0.5558***	0.2120
Midwest	-0.145	0.1947
South	-0.498**	0.1962
Liberal	0.4075**	0.1983
Conservative	-0.3102	0.1955
Christian	0.1122	0.1817
Constant	-1.0319**	0.5193
N		886

Notes: \* indicates coefficient is significant at  $\alpha = .10$ ; \*\* indicates coefficient is significant at  $\alpha = .05$ ; \*\*\* indicates coefficient is significant at  $\alpha = .01$ .

less likely to participate than those from the western United States. Finally, self-described political liberals are more likely to participate than moderates. Marital status and religion do not have a significant impact.

The main findings are consistent with the research cited earlier from Western Europe in terms of the effects on participation from education and arts attendance. In contrast, it is notable that the UK and French studies suggest a positive relationship between amateur activity and income. However, because the European studies do not employ any multivariate analysis, these findings are not necessarily inconsistent, assuming that education and income are as strongly correlated in Europe as they are in the United States.

Using the parameter estimates in Table 2, I now illustrate the effects of each of the significant variables on the actual probability of participating. I start by constructing a baseline case, in which an average respondent has a 42 percent probability (the sample mean) of participating in the arts. First I examine the polar cases: those most and least likely to participate. Then I vary each of the variables individually to see how they affect the baseline probability. I estimate these probabilities by using the logistic function

$$\ln\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = \beta_i x_i + \theta \quad \text{where} \quad \theta = \ln\left(\frac{.42}{1-.42}\right) - \beta_i x_i \cdot x_i \quad (2)$$

denotes the values of the exogenous variables of interest, and each  $\beta_i$  is estimated in the logit regression in Table 2.  $x_i = \{0, 1\}$  for the dummy variables; education is toggled between its median and seventy-fifth-percentile (fifteen years) value; income is between the median and twenty-fifth-percentile (\$13,750); and age is between the median and twenty-fifth-percentile (thirty-two years). The simulation results are summarized in Figure 1.

The least likely active participant in the arts (an older, lower income, nonwhite male from the East Coast, who attended high school but not college, is not politically liberal, and doesn't attend arts events) has a probability of .07. In contrast, the most likely participant (a young, higher income, white, liberal, college-educated woman from the West Coast who attends arts events) has a probability of .82.

The sensitivity analysis on each significant parameter individually off the baseline probability of .42 shows that being white alone leads to a twenty-two-point increase in the probability of participating. Moving from thirteen to fifteen years of education increases the probability by twenty points, as does attending arts events. Liberalism is associated with a ten-point increase. Men have a seven-point lower probability than women. Those in the top quarter of the income distribution are eight points less likely to participate than those with average incomes. Southerners and Easterners are eleven and thirteen points lower than the baseline, respectively. Finally, a

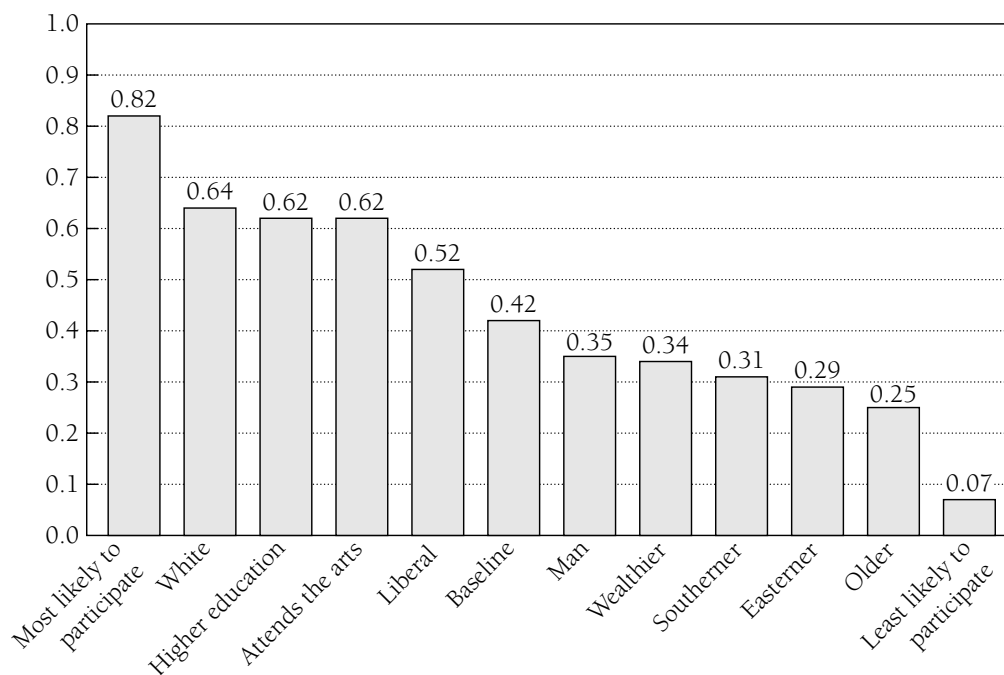


Figure 1. Probabilities of Participation in the Arts

fifty-seven-year-old is seventeen points less likely to participate than a forty-three-year-old.

## Conclusions

This article has taken the first steps toward characterizing active arts participants in the United States. The GSS data show that predictors of arts participation in general and amateur participation in particular are (in order of absolute importance) race, education, attendance at arts events, age, region of residence, political ideology, income, and gender.

Beyond just illuminating the predictors of active arts participation, by virtue of the overwhelming number of amateurs in the sample, these results might be used to represent nonprofessionals in comparison to professionals. Although these groups are similar in some ways—for example, higher levels of education than the population average—a number of differences stand out. First, the effect of age on amateur activity is complex. Amateurs tend to be older than professionals (at median ages of forty-six in the GSS versus forty-one years for visual artists), yet age is negatively associated with unpaid participation. Second, artists in the GSS are more ethnically diverse than professionals, who tend to be overwhelmingly white (95 percent, in the case of authors; Alper and others, 1996).

Future research might build on this article in a number of ways. First, the connections between the professional and amateur arts worlds are not particularly well understood. Given the income effects on participation, I suspect that artists may choose to participate as amateurs as much for reasons of opportunity cost (the value of the forgone alternative uses of time) as for lack of professional opportunity. Second, researchers might explore the key concepts from the economic literature on altruism in greater depth in order to build a coherent theory of amateur activity as distinct from other types of volunteering.

The results in this article may have implications with respect to current U.S. cultural policy. Namely, much public arts funding—especially at the federal level—is focused on professional artists (Chapman, 1992; Marquis, 1995). Assuming that amateur rather than professional participation is easier to induce among nonartists (especially among schoolchildren), this might be a better focus for government arts funding. The regression coefficients here suggest that the most effective levers for inducing this type of participation are probably education and exposure to arts events.

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