

# The reason why middle class people are more likely to play music, paint and act revealed

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The reason why middle class people are more likely to play music, paint and act has been revealed in a major new study.

Research involving 78,000 people found that it was not wealth or social status that were strongly linked to people taking part in arts activities as amateurs or professionals.

Instead, it was the level of education that lay behind arts participation, the study by Dr Aaron Reeves, a sociologist at the University of Oxford, found.

In an article in the journal *Sociology*, Dr Reeves said that of the 78,011 surveyed, 18% had taken part in painting or photography, 9% in dance, 10% in music, 2% in drama or opera; 6% had written poetry, plays or fiction. Only 22% had not done any artistic activities.

He found that having a higher income did not make arts participation more likely - those earning over £30,000 a year were less likely to take part than those earning less.

Social status mattered little - those in higher professional jobs were less likely to take part in the arts than those in lower professional jobs, and only slightly more likely to take part than those in lower supervisory roles and semi-routine roles.

Instead, the clearest link with artistic activity was education. After

accounting for the influence of family class background by statistical analysis, he found that those with a degree were around four times more likely to take part in painting and photography than those with no educational qualification, five times more likely to be involved in dance and in crafts, and four times more likely to play a musical instrument.

Those taking part in arts were more likely to be [middle class](#), simply because they were more likely to be highly educated. But although having a middle class background makes it more likely that someone had gone to university, Dr Reeves's findings showed that they were no more likely to take part in arts after graduating than were working class students.

Dr Reeves said that results for arts participation were different from those for watching or listening to arts performances, where social class and status were strongly linked to higher rates of arts consumption.

"Arts participation, unlike arts consumption and cultural engagement generally, is not closely associated with either social class or social status," said Dr Reeves in the article. "This result deviates from the expectation - unexpectedly, those with higher incomes are less likely to be arts participants.

"These results show that it is educational attainment alone, and not [social status](#), that is shaping the probability of being an arts participant."

Dr Reeves suggests two reasons for the link with education. "First, those with higher information processing capacity are more likely to enjoy highbrow cultural practices, such as arts participation, and be university graduates. In short, university graduates are more likely to possess the cultural resources necessary for both arts consumption and [arts](#) participation.

"Second, universities make admissions decisions using information on extracurricular and cultural activities, increasing the likelihood that university graduates are culturally active."

**More information:** 'Neither class nor status: arts participation and the social strata' *Sociology*, 2015.

Provided by SAGE Publications

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