

A Matter of Choice? Arts Participation Patterns of Americans with Disabilities

The 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) allows researchers, for the first time, to investigate arts-participation patterns for a nationally representative sample of disabled adults. This is possible because in 2008 the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS), of which the SPPA is a periodic supplement, added questions about adult disability status.

In 2012, nearly 28 million U.S. adults (12 percent of the adult population) had some type of disability, such as serious difficulties hearing, seeing, walking or climbing stairs, according to the CPS. The 2012 SPPA shows that this subgroup was **less likely than adults in general to have attended a live performing arts event or to have visited an art museum or gallery** in the past 12 months.

At the same time, disabled adults were **equally likely as all adults to have attended a visual arts, music, dance, or theater event** if it occurred in a **place of worship**. Regarding certain other forms of arts participation—creating **visual art or pottery or ceramics, doing creative writing, or consuming art via electronic media**—adults with disabilities proved just as likely as all U.S. adults to have done those activities at least once in the 12-month period.

Moreover, for at least one category of art-making—**the fiber arts**—they were even **more likely than adults in general to have participated**.

Despite some parity in their arts participation levels for certain activity types, disabled adults were **less likely than adults in general to have viewed and/or listened to art via handheld or mobile devices**. Given the flexibility, convenience, and variety of content and formats that such platforms afford--and the relatively high rates at which disabled adults experience art via *other* electronic media—it appears that better strategies to engage disabled adults through these newer options are warranted.

Summary of Findings

- In 2012, nearly 28 million U.S. adults had some type of disability, including serious difficulty seeing or hearing, or difficulty walking or climbing stairs. Persons 65 and older compose 45 percent of U.S. adults with disabilities.
- Disabled adults are underrepresented in performing and/or visual arts audiences. While disabled adults compose nearly 12 percent of the U.S. adult population, they are just under 7 percent of all adults attending performing arts events or visiting art museums.
- Still, disabled adults are just as likely as adults in general to attend an art exhibit or a live performing arts event in a place of worship.

- Disabled adults are just as likely as all U.S. adults to create pottery and ceramics, do creative writing, or create visual art such as paintings or sculptures. Adults with disabilities are more likely than adults in general to create fiber arts such as weaving or quilting.
- Disabled adults are just as likely as the general adult population to use radio, TV, or the Internet to listen to or watch programs about classical music, opera, theater, or dance. But disabled adults are less likely to use hand-held or mobile devices to consume art.
- Beyond their disability status itself, other factors inhibiting arts attendance by disabled adults could be related to their generally lower levels of educational attainment and the fact that fewer disabled adults report having had certain arts experiences in childhood.

Who Are Adults with Disabilities?

In June 2008, the Current Population Survey (CPS) began asking respondents about disabilities. Defined by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, adults with disabilities tracked by the CPS consist of adults with one or more of the following conditions:

- Deaf, or serious difficulty hearing
- Blind, or serious difficulty seeing (even when wearing glasses)
- Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs
- Difficulty dressing or bathing
- Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, serious difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping

As the table below shows, nearly 12 percent of the CPS sample, representing 27.6 million U.S. adults, report having one or more disabilities. Serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs is the most common disability (reported by 7.2 percent of adults), followed by difficulty doing errands alone (reported by 4.1 percent of adults).

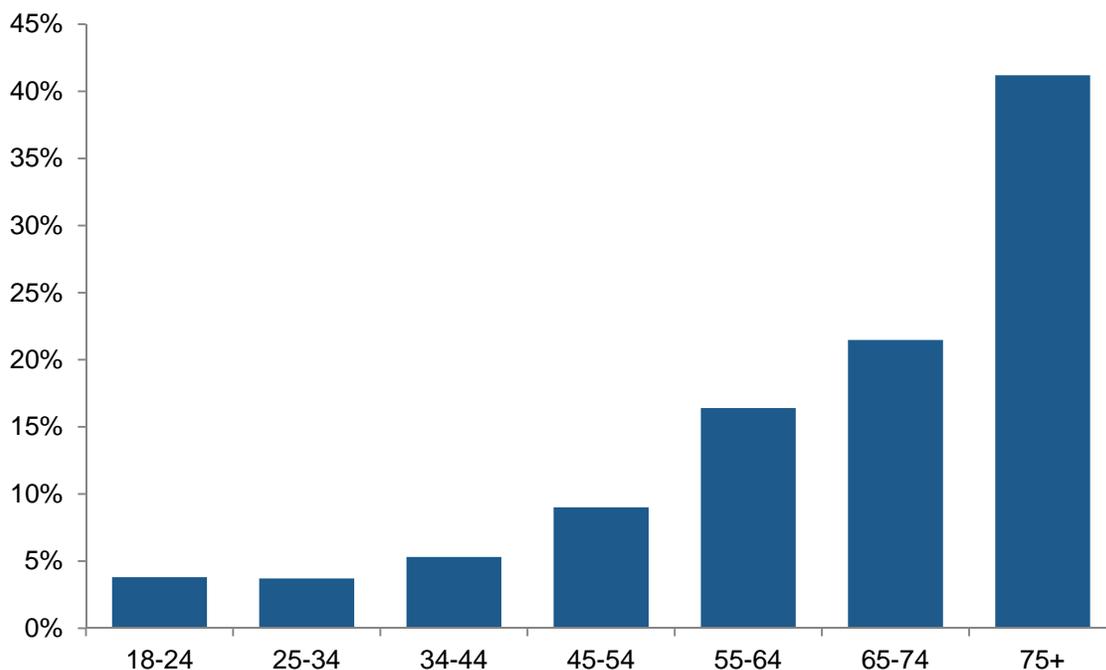
(*Note:* Because disability *by type* composes relatively small shares of the U.S. population, the 2012 SPPA can provide reliable estimates of arts participation only for the aggregate group of adults with *any* reported disability—in 2012, 11.7 percent of the U.S. population.)

Number and Percent of U.S. Adults with Disabilities: 2012		
	Percent of U.S. adult population	Number of adults (in millions)
Any disability condition	11.7%	27.6
Deaf or serious difficulty hearing	3.2%	7.4
Blind or serious difficulty seeing	1.7%	4.0
Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions	3.7%	8.8
Serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs	7.2%	16.9
Difficulty dressing or bathing	2.1%	4.8
Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, serious difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping	4.1%	9.6
Note: The sum of adults by type of disability exceeds the total with any disability condition because respondents can have more than one disability.		
Source: 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts		

Age is frequently linked with disability. While most older adults are not disabled, disabilities are concentrated among adults 65 and older. For example, fewer than 5 percent of young adults aged 18-34 report having disabilities. That rate jumps to 9 percent among adults 45-54, and more than doubles to 22 percent among adults 65-74. Slightly more than 41 percent of people ages 75 and older are disabled.

Looked at another way, adults 65 and older compose fewer than 20 percent of the U.S. adult population, yet they are 46 percent of all disabled adults.

Percent of U.S. Adults Who Are Disabled, by Age Group: 2012



Data source: 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts

Other Demographic Characteristics of Adults with Disabilities

Disability rates of men and women are similar, as are rates of whites and African Americans. Hispanics, on the other hand, are less likely to be disabled. In 2012, nearly 9 percent of Hispanic adults reported having disabilities. That rate was roughly 4-5 percentage points lower than the disability rates for non-Hispanic white and black adults.

This pattern likely reflects, at least in part, the fact that Hispanics are typically younger than whites and African Americans. In 2012, for instance, the median age for Hispanic adults was 38, versus 49 for non-Hispanic whites and 43 for non-Hispanic African American adults.¹

Disabled adults are also less likely to hold a bachelor's degree. In 2012, 19.6 percent of all U.S. adults (25 and older) held bachelor's degrees. Among disabled adults, that rate was 8.2 percent.

¹ The median age of adults of "other" races, including Asian Americans, and adults reporting two or more races, was 40 in 2012.

Age also plays a role in the educational attainment of disabled adults. For example, 20-24 percent of adults who were 25-64 years old held bachelor's degrees in 2012. But among adults 65-74, that rate was 14 percent; in 2012, just 11 percent of adults 75 and older held bachelor's degrees.

Performing and Visual Arts Attendance

In 2012, 23.3 percent of U.S. adults with disabilities attended a live performing arts event. Although 14 percentage points below the share of all U.S. adults attending, the performing-arts attendance rate among adults with disabilities signifies 6.2 million disabled adults having experienced live concerts, plays, and dance performances in 2012.

As they are for the general population, musical plays and outdoor performing arts festivals are the most popular SPPA-tracked performing-arts events attended by adults with disabilities—9 percent went to a musical play in 2012, and a slightly greater share (11 percent) attended an outdoor performing arts festival.²

In 2012, roughly 15 percent of adults with disabilities went to a craft festival, and nearly the same share (14.5 percent) toured a park, monument, or neighborhood for its historic or design value. During the same period, 11.4 percent (3.1 million disabled adults) visited an art museum or gallery.

² The 2012 SPPA also captured attendance at "other music, theater, or dance performances," though not reported in the table of aggregated estimates on p.6 In 2012, almost 12 percent of all U.S. adults attended these "other" types of performances, while nearly 8 percent of disabled adults attended.

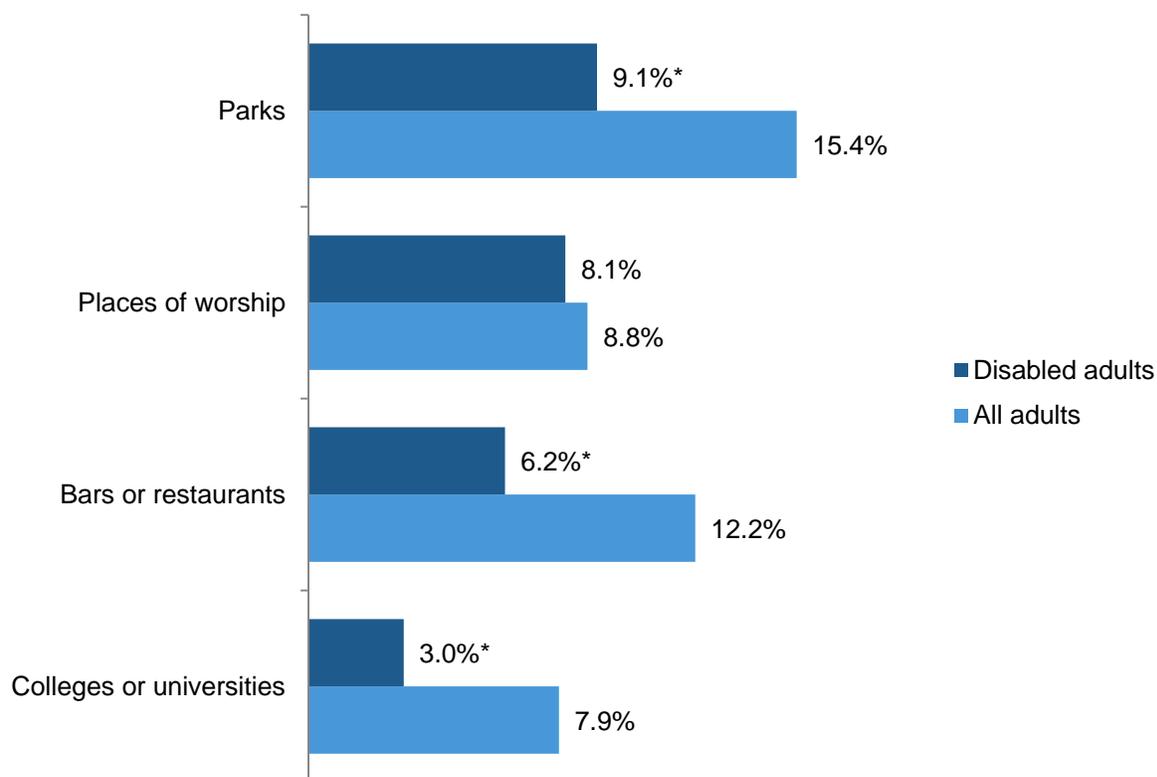
Table 1. Percent of U.S. Adults with Disabilities Who Attended a Visual and/or Performing Arts Event at Least Once in the Past 12 Months: 2012				
	All U.S. adults (Population = 235 million)		U.S. adults with disabilities (Population = 27.6 million)	
	Percent who attended	Number of adults who attended (in millions)	Percent who attended	Number of adults who attended (in millions)
PERFORMING ARTS ATTENDANCE				
Live performing arts event	37.4%	87.7	23.3%	6.4
Jazz concert	8.1%	19.1	4.3%	1.2
Classical concert	8.8%	20.6	6.1%	1.7
Latin concert	5.1%	11.9	1.6%	0.4
Opera	2.1%	5.0	1.3%	0.4
Musical play	15.2%	35.7	9.2%	2.5
Non-musical play	8.3%	19.4	4.9%	1.4
Dance	7.4%	17.5	5.0%	1.4
Outdoor performing arts festivals	20.8%	48.9	10.6%	2.9
VISUAL ARTS EVENT ATTENDANCE				
Visual arts event	39.0%	91.7	25.0%	6.9
Visited an art museum or gallery	21.0%	49.4	11.4%	3.1
Attended a visual arts festival or crafts fair	22.4%	52.7	14.8%	4.1
Toured a park, monument, building, or neighborhood for its historic or design value	23.9%	56.1	14.5%	4.0
Note: All of the differences between disabled adults and total U.S. adult populations are statistically significant at the 90 percent level.				
Source: 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts				
April 2015				
Office of Research & Analysis				
National Endowment for the Arts				

Venues for Arts Attendance

Lower attendance rates among disabled adults are also reflected in certain venues for live performances and art exhibits. For example, 15.4 percent of all adults attended an art exhibit or performing arts event in a park; the share of disabled adults attending in parks was 9.1 percent. Similarly, 12.2 percent of adults attended an event in a bar or restaurant, while only half that share of adults with disabilities attended art exhibits or performances in those places.

A clear exception to this pattern, however, is observed in attendance at churches, synagogues, or other places of worship. In 2012, roughly 8 percent of both the general population and adults with disabilities attended an art exhibit or music, theater, or dance performance in a place of worship.

Percent of Adults Who Attended An Art Exhibit or Performing Arts Event, by Disability Status and Selected Venue: 2012



* Differences between disabled adults and the total U.S. population are statistically significant at the 90 percent level.

Source: 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts

How the Demographic Characteristics of Disabled Adults Factor into Arts Attendance

Data from the 2012 General Social Survey (GSS), which is conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, show that 1 in 3 U.S. adults were interested in attending the performing arts in 2012 but did not because they found it too difficult to get to the event.³ Moreover, 43 percent of adults who wanted to go to an art exhibit, but did not, reported as a barrier their difficulty getting there.

When it comes to adults with disabilities, physical handicap and illness (as they affect access to a location or venue) undoubtedly serve as barriers to arts attendance. Holding those factors aside, however, the 2012 SPPA (which does not capture physical barriers to arts attendance) suggests that lower educational attainment and childhood arts

³ For more information, see NEA Research [Report #59, When Going Gets Tough: Barriers and Motivations Affecting Arts Attendance](#).

experiences among disabled adults likely contributed to their lower performing arts and/or art museum attendance.

To illustrate, although a large share of disabled adults are 65 and older, age *per se* does not appear to play a significant role in performing and/or visual arts attendance patterns among adults with disabilities. In 2012, 21 percent of disabled adults younger than 65, as well as those 65 and older, attended at least one jazz or classical music concert, or play, or ballet performance, or they visited an art museum or gallery.

Instead, lower rates of arts attendance by adults with disabilities appear linked with their generally lower educational rates of attainment, compared with all adults. Low attendance by this subgroup may be associated, furthermore, with its less frequent reports of having had a live arts experience in early childhood, compared with reports from the U.S. adult population in general.

What follows is a description of the methodology used to test these correlations. The correlation coefficient, a value between 0 and 1, quantifies the strength of a relationship between two variables—the closer the coefficient is to 1, the stronger the relationship. Between attending the performing arts as an adult and holding a bachelor's degree or higher level of training, the correlation coefficient is 43 percent; the coefficient is 52 percent between art museum attendance and college training.⁴

The correlation coefficient is roughly 50 percent between attending the performing arts as an adult and having taken music or dance classes in childhood (under 18). The coefficient is also 50 percent between adult performing-arts attendance and attendance in childhood

Similarly, the correlation coefficient between visiting an art museum or gallery as an adult and visiting in childhood is 55 percent.

Against this backdrop, disabled adults are less likely to have obtained a college degree or to have had childhood arts experiences. Data from the 2012 SPPA show that 31 percent of all U.S. adults aged 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher level of training. The share of disabled adults aged 25 and older who hold degrees is less than half that rate (14.5 percent).

While 38 percent of all U.S. adults took music or dance classes in childhood, 32 percent of disabled adults reported taking those classes. The share of disabled adults who visited an art museum or gallery as a child is nearly 13 percentage points below the share of all U.S. adults who went to one of those places in childhood.

⁴ SPPA sample sizes of adults with disabilities are insufficient to support reliable estimates from regression models. Instead, results from tetrachoric correlation analysis are presented.

Percent of U.S. Adults: 2012						
	Attended a performing arts event as an adult	Visited an art museum or gallery as an adult	Hold a bachelor's degree or higher level of education ¹	Took music lessons as a child	Attended a live music, theater, or dance performance as a child	Visited an art museum or gallery as a child
All adults	37.4%	21.0%	31.0%	38.0%	55.6%	54.3%
Disabled adults	23.3%	11.4%	14.5%	32.1%	43.7%	41.5%
¹ Ages 25 and older						
Note: All of the differences between disabled adults and total U.S. adult populations are statistically significant at the 90 percent level.						
Source: 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts						
April 2015						
Office of Research & Analysis						
National Endowment for the Arts						

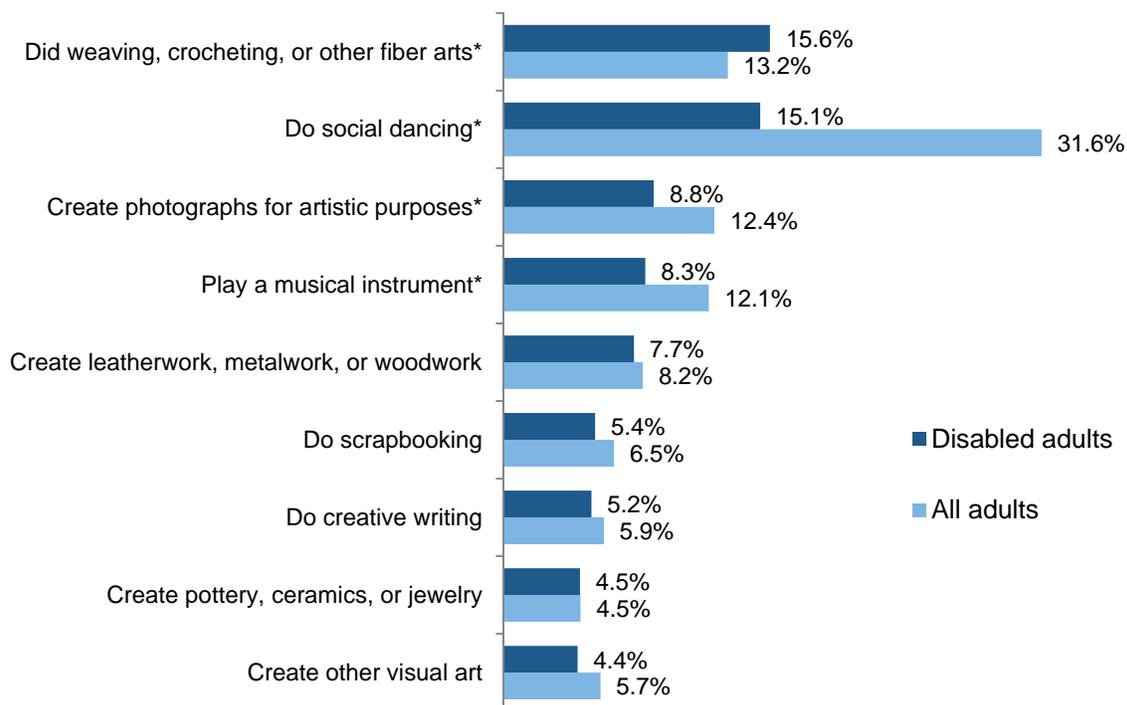
Creating or Performing Art

Disabled adults create or perform certain types of art at rates similar to those of all adults. For one art form—weaving, crocheting, or other fiber arts—the share of adults creating exceeds the rate for all adults.

In 2012, for example, nearly 16 percent of disabled adults did weaving, crocheting, quilting, or other fiber arts. That rate was significantly greater than the 13 percent of all U.S. adults creating fiber art. Moreover, adults with disabilities are just as likely as the general population to create: pottery, ceramics, or jewelry (4.5 percent); leatherwork, leatherwork, or woodwork (8 percent); scrapbooking (5-6 percent); creative writing (5-6 percent); and other visual art such as paintings and sculptures (4-6 percent).

Relative to all U.S. adults, however, adults with disabilities are significantly less likely to play a musical instrument, take photographs for artistic purposes, or do social dancing.

Percent of U.S. Adults Who Created or Performed Art, by Disability Status: 2012



* Differences between disabled adults and total U.S. adult populations are statistically significant at the 90 percent level.

Source: 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts

Reading Books and Literature

In 2012, 55 percent of U.S. adults read books (not required for work or school); 45 percent read novels or short stories. Reading rates among adults with disabilities are generally lower. Even so, a considerable share of disabled adults read at least one book or a novel or short story in the past 12 months. For instance, nearly 46 percent of disabled adults read books in 2012; 37 percent read literature (novels or short stories, poems, or plays).

Consuming Art Through Electronic Media

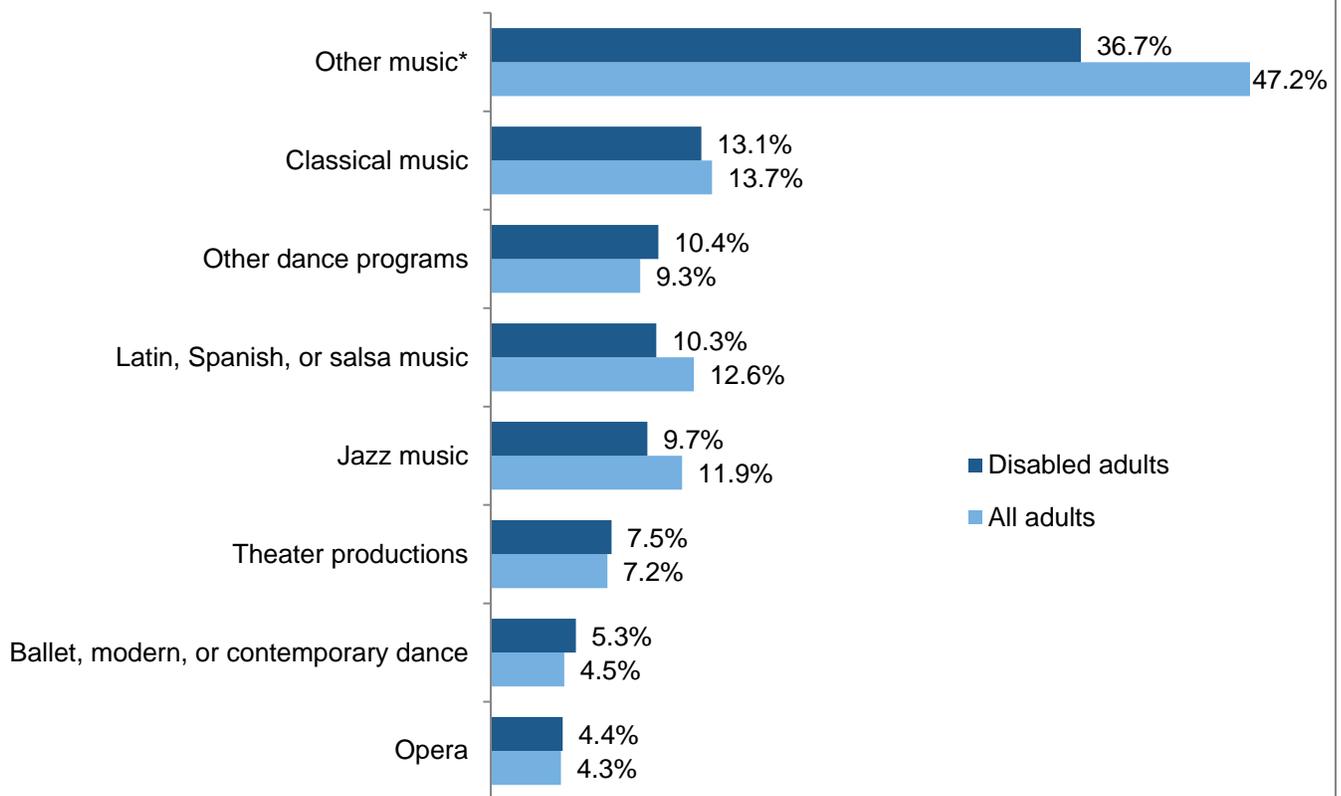
On average, disabled adults watch 4 hours of TV per day, 2 hours more than the daily time spent watching by all adults. Consequently, it is perhaps not surprising that the share of disabled adults experiencing the arts on radio, TV, or the Internet are relatively high—in many cases, on par with the overall adult population.

For example, the share of disabled adults listening to or watching classical music performances on radio, TV, or the Internet in 2012 was 13.1 percent—a rate comparable to the 13.7 percent of all adults watching or listening to classical music.

Comparing disabled adults with all adults, rates were similar for listening to or watching opera (4 percent), theater productions (7 percent), ballet or contemporary dance (5 percent), and other dance programs (9-10 percent).

The highest rate of using the radio, TV, or the Internet to listen to or watch music is reported for "other music" such as pop, rock, country, or hip-hop. In 2012, nearly 37 percent of disabled adults used those media to listen to or watch other music. Although that rate was high, it was well below the share of all adults who did so (47 percent).

Percent of U.S. Adults Who Watched or Listened to Performing Arts Broadcasts Via Radio, TV, or the Internet by Disability Status: 2012



* Difference between disabled adults and the total U.S. adult population is statistically significant at the 90 percent level.

Source: 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts

Consuming Art Through Mobile Devices

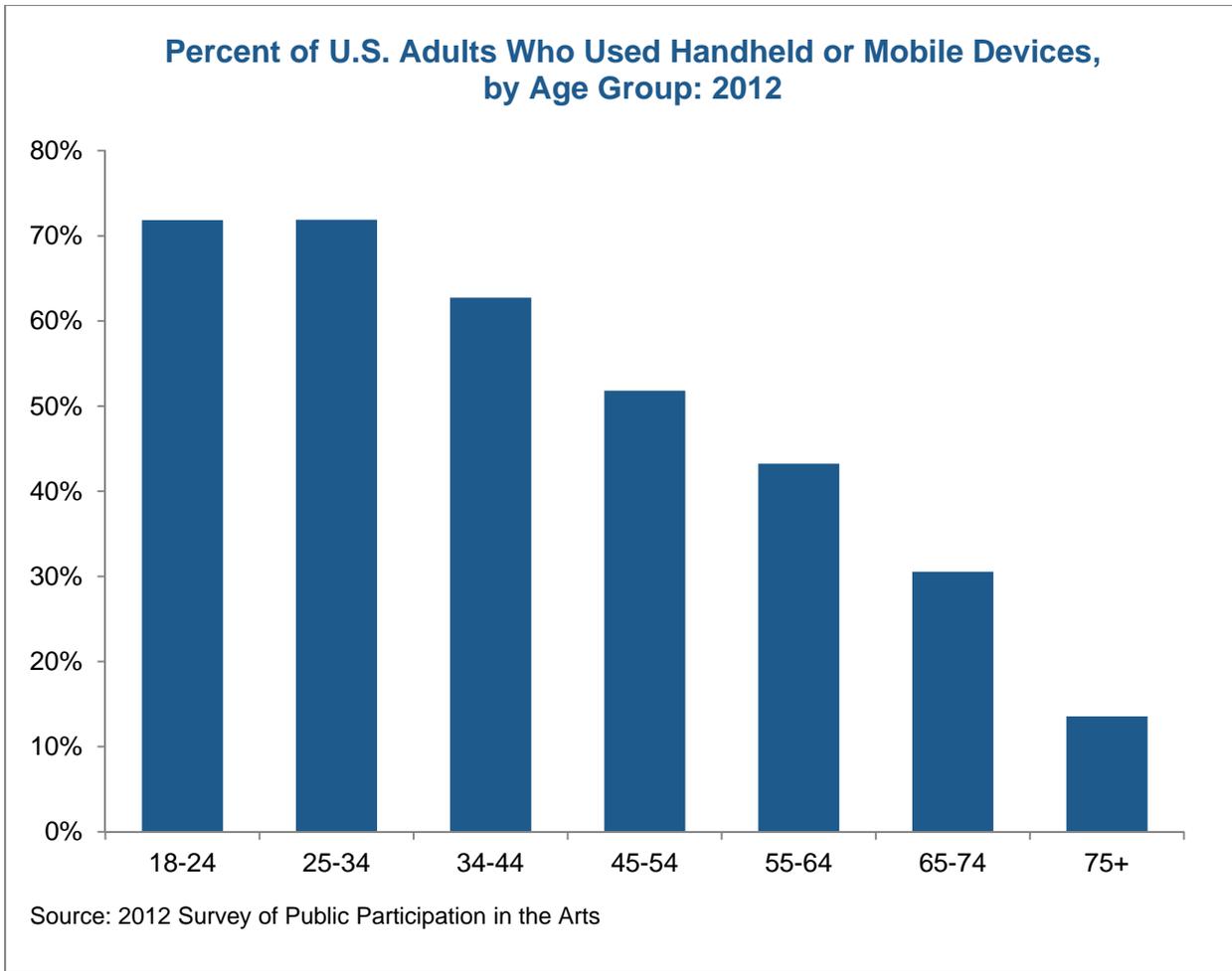
In 2012, nearly one-third of all adults used hand-held or mobile devices such as a smart phone, e-reader, or tablet to watch, listen to, or download music. The rate among disabled adults was less than half that share (just under 15 percent). The rate at which disabled adults use hand-held or mobile devices to read, listen to, or download literature (novels, short stories, poetry, or plays) was also roughly half the rate for the general population (8.7 percent of disabled adults versus 16 percent of all adults).

These lower rates likely stem from the fact that disabled adults are less likely to use hand-held or mobile devices—a pattern consistent with older adults in general.

In 2012, the share of disabled adults using hand-held or mobile devices was 28.5 percent—almost 25 percentage points lower than the share of all adults using such devices. As discussed above, people 65 and older are 46 percent of the adult disabled population. Older adults, in turn, are less likely to use smart phones, e-readers, or tablets. As disability rises with age, so does the use of mobile devices decline.

To illustrate, more than 70 percent of 18-to-34-year-olds used a hand-held or mobile device in 2012. That share drops by 10 percentage points among adults 35-44, and drops an additional 10 points for those aged 45-54.

Among adults 65-74, roughly 30 percent used such devices; 14 percent of adults 75 and older used them.



When it comes to mobile device use, therefore, disabled adults have use patterns similar to those of older, non-disabled adults. Still, given their rapidly improving functionality, versatility, and ease of use, such technology platforms may in the future present even greater opportunities for engaging disabled adults, especially when access to an arts venue or location is a barrier.