Author's response to reviews

Title: Cultural activity participation and associations with self-perceived health, life-satisfaction and mental health. The Young HUNT Study, Norway.

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Daphna Levinson,

Thank you for the opportunity to revise our manuscript. The two reviewers vary widely in their assessment of the article, and whereas reviewer 2 find the study satisfactory, reviewer 1 highlights a number of supposed serious problems. A revision into the manuscript has at this point not been conducted. In the following we address the issues raised by reviewer 1.

There are several serious problems with this study. Most of them come from the quality of the Hunt 3 questionnaire which I find under normal scientific standard, because of:

A. The lack of Likert scales with symmetry and equidistance (I would recommend a 5-point likert scale like this:
1) Very good
2) Good
3) Neither good nor bad
4) Bad
5) Very Bad
Without a good rating scale data has a poor quality.

Our response on A: We agree that Likert scales are preferable for a number of questions. We do however disagree that they are below normal scientific standards. The fact that a large number of studies have been published utilizing this material, including several in the world's most prestigious scientific journals, indicates they are indeed satisfactory (see eg Krokstad et al 2013).

B. Lack of sufficient questions on self-image (identity)
C: lack of sufficient questions regarding life philosophy
D: Lack of sufficient questions regarding sexuality (sex life, sexual satisfaction, sexual problems, sexual orientation)
E: Lack of sufficient questions about personal history
E: Lack of sufficient questions about quality of life – happiness, life satisfaction etc.
F: Lack of good questions on the person’s ability to love
Without these questions it is impossible to make a satisfactory analysis of the associations of the factors associated to health, and any causal relationship between any factor and health can never be concluded.

Our response on B to G: The questions listed by the reviewer obviously tap on important dimensions in terms of adolescent’s health. But we would like to underline that the aim of the present study was to explore associations between cultural participation and some...
selected aspects of health in a population. We did not set out to investigate a number of other important dimensions of life, nor did we put forward any grand theory.

The study seem to suffer from insufficient knowledge of the results found by other scientists, i.e. Antonovsky who found the life philosophy of essential significance, and of the psychodynamic research tradition (Freud, Jung, Reich, Adler etc) – the psychosexual development is the most important single dimension to determine future health both physical and mental. Froms and Bubers important work on love is also ignored...

We agree with the reviewer that there are a number of existing theories of importance for adolescent’s health and wellbeing that could have been studied, but again this was not the aim of this study. This field of study, cultural participation and health, is a field in its infancy and is gradually maturing, and it might well converge with existing theories that the reviewer is highlighting.

The conclusion that cultural involvement should be what gives good health is not likely to be true; extrovert involvement is more likely to be a mere symptom of good health and thriving! Therefore the conclusions are not documented in the article and not likely to be true.

We did not put forward any causal claims and the mere fact that this is a cross sectional study precludes any kind of causal language. As the reviewer rightfully point out, cultural participation and extrovert involvement is contingent on good health and thriving. And conversely, participation in cultural activities might be conducive for health. More properly designed longitudinal studies might be beneficial in future research in this field of study when such data become available. We also wish to point out that a study with similar design but based on data from adults in the same population study (HUNT), was published in the highly respected Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health (Cuypers et al 2012). The study received widespread international attention.

We thank the reviewers and look forward to a new evaluation and editor’s opinion.

On the behalf of the authors

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References
