

Theatre Involvement and Well-Being, Age Differences, and Lessons from Long-Time Subscribers

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This project was supported in part or in whole by an award from the *Research: Art Works* program at the National Endowment for the Arts: Grant# 15-3800-7007.

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Research Article

Theatre Involvement and Well-Being, Age Differences, and Lessons From Long-Time Subscribers

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Received October 12, 2016; Editorial Decision Date March 3, 2017

Decision Editor: Barbara J. Bowers, PhD

Abstract

Background and Objectives: Activities that provide positive emotions, meaningful social interaction, and psychological stimulation can bolster well-being throughout life. We tested a model of psychological benefit from, and age differences in, adult ticket buyers' involvement with a large regional theatre.

Research Design and Methods: We sent online surveys to Actors Theatre of Louisville ticketbuyers, measuring involvement with the theatre, satisfaction/enjoyment, social engagement, flow, and sense of belonging while attending, and well-being. Structural models ($N = 496$) tested a model of well-being and age differences; focus groups of older subscribers ($N = 20$) elaborated quantitative findings.

Results: As hypothesized, theatre involvement was indirectly related to satisfaction and enjoyment of the theatre, hedonic well-being, and social functioning, through the psychosocial benefits of flow, social engagement, and belonging. Age moderated the model relationships: involvement was more strongly related to benefits for younger than older participants, but there were no age differences in the relationship between benefits and well-being. Focus group participants articulated how theatre contributes to a sense of community and pride of place, connecting individual well-being to community well-being.

Discussion and Implications: Involvement in performing arts organizations may have lifelong benefits. The relationship between involvement and psychosocial benefit may be particularly strong for younger audience members despite the fact that older adults have more involvement. Older adults with long-term involvement appear to benefit even when they reduce their involvement. Our qualitative findings underscore the great richness of experience that younger generations might lose as a result of lower participation.

Keywords: Well-being, Mixed methods, Engagement

More than a third of U.S. adults attend at least one live performing arts event annually, and nearly one-fifth attend a theatre production ([National Endowment for the Arts, 2013](#)). However, attendance numbers have declined across the last three National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) surveys (i.e., across approximately 15 years), for all except those 65 and older ([NEA, 2013](#)). Recent research has emphasized psychological motivations for attendance,

such as enjoyment, learning, and social interaction ([Hager & Winkler, 2011](#); [Seaman, 2005](#)), constructs that overlap with those in positive psychology research, which focuses on characteristics of a “life well lived” ([Keyes, 2003](#)) and in activities and habits linked to well-being in late life. Activities that increase positive emotions and support meaningful social interaction and psychological stimulation have the potential to bolster well-being throughout

life. Thus, motivations that lead people to the theatre may also promote well-being. Whereas research has linked psychological motivations to ticket-buying, we know of no research that has linked the same motivations to long-term well-being, although there is much research on the value of active arts participation for well-being in late life (Noice, Noice, & Kramer, 2013). A recent systematic review that focused exclusively on older adults' active creation or on their viewing age-related theatre pieces (Bernard & Rickett, 2016), found evidence of benefits to this kind of creative involvement, but noted the need for conceptual frameworks. We found no published research on the links between theatre involvement as an audience member and well-being, a lack noted by Rickett and Bernard in a previous report (2014). It is this gap in the literature that we set out to address. The present paper is from a three-part, mixed methods study funded by the NEA; we examined involvement of audience members at a prominent regional theatre, focusing on benefits of sustained involvement with that organization, particularly among older patrons.

Why do People go to the Theatre?

Quality of performances, availability, and cost are important determinants of theatre participation (Toma & Meads 2007), as are wealth, higher education, and having more leisure time (Ateca-Amestoy 2008). These variables, however, reveal little about how individuals benefit from attending the theatre. Hager and Winkler (2011) found that demographic factors were the strongest predictors of ticket-buying, but psychological factors were also significant: desire for escape or recreation, higher self-esteem, and opportunity for social interaction. These findings point to possible advantages for ticket buyers. A qualitative marketing study (Radbourne et al. 2009) linked the emotional and cognitive aspects of the audience's response to the idea that audiences are seeking an engaging, spiritual, or self-actualizing experience.

Marketing research viewed through the lens of positive psychology tells us that adults go to the theatre seeking positive affect, cognitive stimulation, social engagement, and a sense of belonging, all experiences that should enhance well-being. Naturally, the dependent variable in marketing studies is ticket-buying rather than well-being. One large study of Norwegians-related receptive cultural activities to life satisfaction and to well-being outcomes (Cuypers et al. 2012). Further study of the connection between theatre-going and well-being can enhance our knowledge of benefits to individuals and also how theatre benefits society by promoting well-being.

The Changing Demographics of Theatre Audiences

Across the last three NEA surveys, diminished theatre participation is evident, but older adults' participation has been

stable. Age differences in theatre involvement may relate to other differences in life goals and community involvement (Twenge, Campbel, & Freeman, 2012). Young adults seek new experiences and to build social connections, whereas older adults focus more on meaning-making and maintaining positive affect (Carstensen, Fung, & Charles, 2003). Different motives could explain age differences, but not why younger cohorts' attendance continues to decline. The decline in traditional season-ticket holders has been leading arts organizations to adapt their scheduling, redefine seasons, and offer flexible subscriptions (*"The Art of Wooing"* 2014). Although these adaptations make marketing sense, do they diminish the advantages gained by ticket buyers? In the study by Radbourne et al. (2009), for example, subscribers found more aesthetic enjoyment and sense of belonging than one-time attendees. Johnson and Gabarino (2001) found that subscribers were more satisfied with performances and facilities, had more trust and confidence in the organization, and felt more committed than occasional ticket buyers. Regular and long-term involvement in an organization creates a greater sense of community and more pro-social behavior (Oishi et al. 2007). Cohort differences in audiences may affect the benefits derived from arts involvement.

Theatre and Well-Being

Figure 1 depicts a hypothetical model of theatre involvement, benefit, and well-being derived from the convergence of theatre marketing and positive psychology research. Contemporary models of well-being have emphasized affective experience (e.g., Fredrickson 2001) or both hedonic (feeling good) and eudaimonic (functioning well) dimensions of well-being (Friedman & Ryff 2012; Keyes & Annas 2009). We chose the latter, more inclusive, approach emphasizing affective, social, and psychological dimensions (e.g., Keyes 2009). Researchers have variously emphasized a priori advantages, dispositional attributes, or psychological and behavioral habits in models of how well-being is

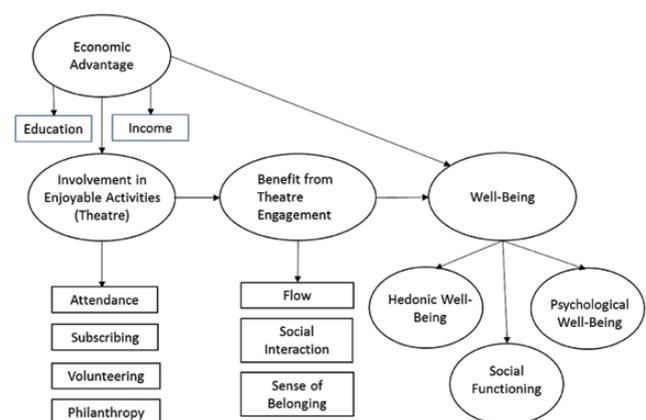


Figure 1. Conceptual model of well-being related to involvement in theatre.

achieved (Diener, 2009). To an extent, well-being is achieved by economic advantages accrued across the lifespan (Argyle 1999), and we include these in our model. Research converges on the importance for well-being of involvement in positive activities, including finding intrinsic value in ordinary activities (Wrzesniewski, Rozin, & Bennett, 2003). Engaging in meaningful activities is one way to achieve a balance of positive over negative affect, an indicator of high well-being (Fredrickson 2001). Cantor and Sanderson (1999) argued that sustained participation in meaningful, culturally valued activities lends order and purpose to daily life across the life span. Commitment to regular activities provides social well-being for individuals and their communities. In our model, we defined such commitment to a theatre through attendance, subscription, volunteering, and philanthropy. Such involvement leads to a sense of belonging (Cantor & Sanderson, 1999), and is associated with higher well-being (Gilbart & Hirdes, 2000) and lower mortality (Kiely & Flacker, 2003). People's sense that their lives are meaningful is also associated with experiencing social belonging, positive mood, or contextual stimuli (e.g., viewing pictures) that makes sense (Heintzelman & King, 2014). Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) argued that experiencing vital engagement, or flow, leads to greater meaning in life. Achieving flow, a person experiences intense focus, timelessness, and pleasure. These individual encounters are made more meaningful by connections to a community of others doing similar things. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) suggested that individuals can experience flow just by appreciating or enjoying art, leading to a sense of immersion, timelessness, intense focus, and social connections through a greater understanding of the perspectives of others. In sum, well-being may be promoted by involvement in activities that increase positive emotions, flow, social connection, and a sense of belonging, all of which may arise from attending theatre. In our model, we define benefit from involvement with the theatre in terms of flow, social connection, and belonging. Positive emotions are incorporated in our hedonic well-being measures and in the measure of satisfaction and enjoyment when attending the theatre.

Hypotheses

We tested the model in Figure 1 using a cross-sectional survey of adult audience members, followed by focus groups of audience members aged 60 and older to support and elaborate findings from the quantitative analyses.

H1. Controlling for education and income, theatre involvement—measured by attendance frequency, subscriber status, volunteerism, and philanthropy—will be indirectly related to greater satisfaction with audience experience, higher positive affect, subjective well-being, and flourishing. This indirect effect will be mediated by psychosocial benefit of the theatre experience (social interaction, a subjective sense of belonging, and reports of “flow” during performances).

H2. Controlling for income and education, older adults will report greater involvement with the organization than younger cohorts. The relationship between involvement and well-being will be moderated by age: older adults will report greater well-being associated with involvement than younger cohorts.

Method

Sample and Design

We employed a complementary mixed methods design with primary emphasis on quantitative model testing, elaborated by qualitative analyses of focus groups (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007), and data integrated following completion of both types of analysis. Actors Theatre of Louisville is a nationally recognized theatre with an average annual attendance of about 140,000. For Part 1 of this research, Actors Theatre staff distributed a link to an online survey to all patrons who had purchased a ticket in the past year for whom they had email addresses (for 75% of season ticketholders and about 50% of single-ticket buyers). The email invitation went to approximately 16,000 single-ticket buyers and 2,344 season subscribers. We used email pre-reminders (a week prior to sending the link) and postreminders (about two weeks after sending the link) to enhance return rate (Kaplowitz et al. 2004). As an incentive for participating, respondents could enter a lottery for a pair of season tickets or other ticket package of their choice. There were 877 individuals who started the questionnaire, but only 676 completed enough to produce usable data. The structural models addressing the primary hypotheses were conducted with the 496 individuals who had complete data on all scales. Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of the full Part 1 sample ($N = 676$, varying by measure), and the sample with complete measures used in the structural analyses. Compared to a 2007 marketing survey of Actors Theatre ticket buyers ($N = 35,376$), the full Part 1 study sample included fewer men (31.5% vs 43.8%) and a higher proportion of people aged 18–33 (10.7% vs 7.4%) or 64 and older (31.5% vs 18.7%). The full sample reflected the 2007 ticket holders' ethnicity (95% vs 96.1% White). The range and distribution of annual household income was similar in both groups, but the Part 1 study sample included a smaller proportion of individuals with an annual income under \$29,999 (5.4% vs 10.0%).

The sample ranged in age from 18 to 87; participants with complete data were significantly younger ($M = 52.07$, $SD = 14.20$) than those with missing data ($M = 60.79$, $SD = 14.21$), $t(668) = 6.97$, $p < .001$, more likely to be single or divorced, $\chi^2(3) = 10.98$, $p = .012$, and more likely to self-identify as White, Western European, Jewish, Mediterranean, Eastern European, or Scandinavian, $\chi^2(1) = 281.46$, $p < .001$. Table 2 shows means and standard deviations for the measured variables related to our hypotheses, for the measures-complete sample and by age group. Participants with complete data reported fewer years

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Part 1 Study Sample

Characteristic	Full sample				Sample with measures complete			
	M	SD	Range	N	M	SD	Range	N
Age	54.33	14.70	18–87	670	52.07	14.20	18–87	496
Years education	15.56	5.26	0–30	649	15.49	5.28	0–27	496
Number of adults in household	1.83	0.64	1–6	669	1.84	0.67	1–6	496
Number of children in household	0.52	1.00	0–5	664	0.58	1.05	0–5	496
	%		Range		%			
Median annual household income	\$75,000–\$99,999	—	<\$29,999–\$150,000+	629	\$75,000–\$99,999	—	<\$29,999–\$150,000+	496
% Male	31.5%	—	—	676	31.0%	—	—	496
% White ^a	95%	—	—	675	95.4%	—	—	496
% Married	65.5%	—	—	673	64.1%	—	—	496

^aSix hundred and forty-four individuals selected at least one of the following ethnic identification categories: White, Western European, Jewish, Mediterranean, Eastern European, or Scandinavian.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Variables Included in Structural Models, for Total Sample and Young and Old Groups

Variable	Sample with measures complete (N = 496)		Ages 18–64, N = 385		65+, N = 111	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Education in years*	15.49	5.28	14.94	5.47	17.42	3.99
Theatre attendance (quartile scores)	2.32	1.06	2.18	1.04	2.81	1.00
Theatre satisfaction*	9.05	1.28	9.15	1.22	8.68	1.41
Theatre enjoyment*	9.07	1.30	9.18	1.26	8.70	1.37
Social engagement	9.08	1.14	9.08	1.15	9.09	1.10
Sense of belonging	11.26	2.39	11.29	2.41	11.17	2.32
Flow*	3.83	0.66	3.87	0.65	3.68	0.66
Satisfaction with life	26.21	6.28	25.88	6.38	27.35	5.80
Positive affect: PANAS	3.65	0.60	3.63	0.59	3.73	0.63
Positive affect: Bradburn	3.60	0.58	3.57	0.59	3.71	0.52
Ryff autonomy*	37.14	6.14	36.74	6.16	38.52	5.91
Ryff environmental mastery*	37.28	6.70	36.73	6.80	39.20	6.00
Ryff personal growth	41.26	5.23	41.09	5.33	41.83	4.84
Ryff purpose in life	38.85	5.78	38.78	5.84	39.12	5.48
Ryff self-acceptance*	37.30	7.29	36.79	7.57	39.05	6.35
Ryff positive relations with others	40.41	5.73	40.39	5.81	40.51	5.47
Keyes social integration	15.64	3.70	15.55	3.76	15.96	3.49
Keyes acceptance of others	14.36	2.86	14.24	2.90	14.77	2.69
Keyes social contribution	17.55	2.73	17.54	2.77	17.58	2.57

*Starred variables differed by age group at $p < .01$ based on independent samples t -tests.

of attendance at Actors Theatre ($M = 10.44$, $SD = 10.99$) than did those with missing data ($M = 13.93$, $SD = 13.30$), $t(866) = 4.13$, $p < .001$, although in both samples there was a large standard deviation. The individuals with complete data also reported purchasing season tickets for fewer years ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 10.34$) than did those with missing data ($M = 9.92$, $SD = 13.32$), $t(859) = 4.49$, $p < .001$; most likely these differences are a function of the younger age of the complete sample. The two samples did not differ

significantly in education, gender, income, volunteer status, number of performances attended, or whether they donated to Actors Theatre in the past year.

Part 2 focus group participants were randomly selected from Part 1 respondents aged 60 and older who indicated interest in further participation. They were compensated with \$25 gift cards. Of a pool of 161 interested participants, 36 were randomly selected, 23 signed up to attend, and 20 participated in one of four groups. There were 6

men and 14 women with a mean age of 65 (range 60–77). They reflected the Part 1 sample with respect to median income, household size, ethnicity, and marital status, but were somewhat more educated, with an average years of education of 18 ($SD = 3.29$).

Measures

Demographics

We used the demographic categories from the Actors Theatre marketing department: age, sex, education (years of education), income categories, ethnicity/racial identity/national origin, and marital status.

Theatre involvement

Theatre involvement items were categories of Actors Theatre patronage, including type of tickets bought (season package or single tickets), donor, and volunteer. We also asked how many performances participants attended in the previous year and, if they volunteered, for how many hours.

Theatre benefit (social engagement, sense of belonging, and flow)

We modified items from previous research (Steger & Kashdan, 2009) to assess social engagement and sense of belonging. Social engagement while attending performances was measured by an item assessing with whom participants typically attended, and two items rating those companions on how close and connected they typically felt to them and the overall quality of the relationship. The sum of the two latter items ranged from 2 to 10. Sense of belonging was three items rating how close and connected, how understood, and how much a sense of belonging participants typically had when attending the theatre, rated on 5-point Likert-type scales and yielding a summed scale score ranging from 3 to 15.

We used the Short Dispositional Flow Scale-II (Jackson, Martin, & Eklund, 2008) to measure Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow. This is a 9-item scale consisting of items rated with respect to engaging in a preferred activity (in this case attending theatre), on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The scale is scored by summing the items and dividing by 9.

Dependent variables: Satisfaction/Enjoyment and Well-being

Satisfaction and enjoyment included four items (two each) designed for this study rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, one item each assessing performances "in general," and one assessing the last performance attended. The two items were combined yielding two scales ranging from 2 to 10 for satisfaction and enjoyment, respectively.

Hedonic Well-being included life satisfaction and positive affect. The Satisfaction with Life Scale is a 5-item, commonly used scale of subjective well-being that uses a 7-point Likert-type rating from "strongly agree" to

"strongly disagree" with scores ranging from 7 to 35 (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). *Positive affect* included the positive items from Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegan, 1988) and Bradburn Affect Scale (Bradburn, 1969): 10 items rated on a 5-point scale regarding frequency of experiencing positive feelings such as "cheerful," "enthusiastic," "extremely happy," "calm," and "peaceful." These measures were from the Midlife Development in the United States-II (MIDUS II; ICPSR, 2010) survey, enabling us to compare our findings to a large national data set.

Our measures of *psychological and social well-being* also came from the MIDUS-II data set. The former was measured with the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being, short form, which has 42-items measuring six dimensions of well-being (Ryff, 1989; ICPSR, 2010). The social well-being scales are 5 3-item scales measuring theoretical dimensions of social functioning (Keyes, 1998; ICPSR, 2010). All of the well-being items are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale.

Quantitative Analyses, Hypothesis 1

We tested hypotheses using structural equation analysis with IBM AMOS. We used a consensus approach to testing model fit recommended by Bollen and Long (1993), using multiple fit indices from different families: chi square, NFI, CFI, and RMSEA with PClose (Browne & Cudek, 1993), evaluating models as adequate if the majority of fit indices exceeded established "rules of thumb" for good fit NFI and CFI >.90; RMSE .05–.08, and nonsignificant PClose. We first tested measurement models to evaluate the structure of the latent variables proposed in Figure 1. Table 3 provides the fit indices of the final measurement models; parameters of all models are available from the first author upon request. Our indicators of economic advantage (income and education) could not be fit as a latent variable, so they were included as exogenous variables in the structural models. Our initial model of theatre involvement, including volunteer status, philanthropy, subscriber (all coded as binary variables because the modal response was zero, resulting in skewed data), and years of attendance, did not meet our established fit criteria. We fit a modified model that showed two correlated factors, involvement (volunteer + philanthropy) and attendance (subscriber + attendance), which provided a superior fit to the single factor model (fit of both models is shown in the first two rows of Table 3). The theatre benefit latent variable, comprised of flow, social engagement during performances, and sense of belonging, fit the data well. We fit individual measurement models for each well-being construct depicted in Figure 1. For Hedonic Well-being, our measurement model contained the two positive affect scales and the Diener life satisfaction scale, but the Diener scale had unacceptably large variance compared to the other two scales, so in the structural models described in the results we eliminated this variable.

Table 3. Fit Indices for Measurement and Structural Models

	DF	Chi square	NFI	CFI	RMSEA	PClose
Measurement models						
Involvement ^a	3	32.62	.904	.912	.14	.000
Involvement and attendance, final model	2	13.966	.959	.964	.110	.025
Theatre benefit	1	2.260	.991	.995	.050	.352
Hedonic well-being ^b	1	37.154	.936	.937	.270	.000
Psychological well-being	2	6.877	.994	.996	.070	.213
Social functioning	2	6.418	.988	.992	.067	.242
Structural models						
1. Audience satisfaction and enjoyment	37	122.26	.914	.938	.068	.013
2. Hedonic well-being	38	106.34	.907	.937	.061	.095
3. Psychological well-being	67	167.19	.916	.948	.055	.207
4. Social functioning	58	148.24	.892	.931	.056	.177

^aThe initial model had a single involvement variable in which subscriber status, attendance frequency, philanthropy, and volunteering were all factors on a single latent variable. The more successful model separated an attendance factor and an “involvement” factor, the former comprising subscribing and attendance, the latter comprising philanthropy and volunteering. ^bAlthough this model had adequate fit by two out of three of the indices, the variance for the Diener Satisfaction Scale was unacceptably high, causing problems in the structural models. The structural models were therefore estimated with only the positive affect scales as indicators for hedonic well-being. The fit of that reduced measurement model could not be tested due to lack of identification.

Psychological Well-Being was comprised of 5 of the 6 Ryff well-being scales: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance. Social Function was comprised of three Keyes social function scales, Acceptance of others, Social Integration, and Social Contribution, plus the Ryff Positive Relations with Others scale. We fit a fourth structural model for a satisfaction/enjoyment latent variable.

Quantitative Analyses for Hypothesis 2

To test the hypothesis that age group would moderate the relationship between theatre involvement and well-being, we compared each structural model described above between adults aged 65 years and older ($N = 111$), and the younger participants ($N = 385$). We first constrained all regression weights to be equal across the two groups (fully constrained), compared that to a fully unconstrained model, and tested the chi square difference for significance. When there was a significant group difference, we tested moderation path by path, unconstraining individual path coefficients one at a time and comparing the chi square difference in each case.

Focus Group Method and Analysis

We used focus group data to elaborate on the explanatory elements in our quantitative model. The first and third authors led four focus groups, following a semi-structured interview covering topics reflecting our quantitative hypotheses: motivation to attend the theatre, benefits and positivity, and well-being. We asked participants what brought them to the theatre, how they were involved, why they continued to be involved, and what they thought they gained from that involvement. We asked them about their most positive experiences, and to avoid confirmatory

bias also asked them to discuss their most negative experiences. We asked about barriers to attendance that they had encountered, whether their experiences or involvement had changed over the years, and about motivating younger audiences. Finally we asked about how or whether they related their involvement with their personal well-being.

Focus group audio-recordings were professionally transcribed. We used a directed content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) with these data. Two coders (the first and second authors) independently extracted a priori themes that paralleled the measured Part 1 variables; these extractions were accomplished by hand. To increase the reliability of our extracted themes and to check for bias, two undergraduate research assistants who were blind to study hypotheses also independently extracted themes. All coders also looked for evidence that contradicted expected themes. The second author then examined the a priori themes side-by-side with those identified by the blind coders for convergence and divergence. There was strong convergence among raters on themes of involvement with the theatre, social engagement, and sense of belonging. The blind raters did not identify flow experiences found by the a priori raters. There was good convergence around the hedonic well-being theme of interest/attentiveness and the eudaimonic well-being themes of social integration and meaningfulness. Once all raters had reached a consensus, by meeting and discussion, on the organization of the identified themes, the second author constructed a narrative that was reviewed and edited by the other authors.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Model Test for all Age Groups Combined

Table 3 presents the fit indices of the four structural models, and the coefficients are given in Table 4. All four models

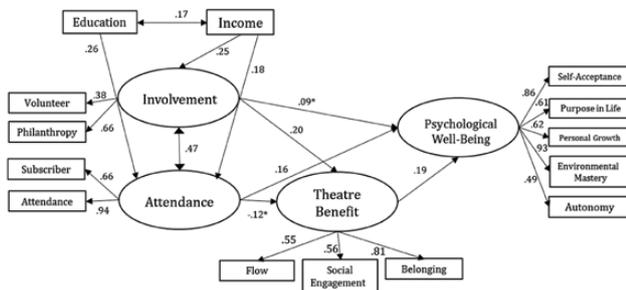
Table 4. Structural Equation Model Estimates for the Whole Sample and for Younger (Less Than 65 Years) and Older Groups from Moderation Analyses

Effects tested			Unstandardized regression weight	S.E.	Standardized regression weight	Younger group Standard Weight	Older group Standard Weight
Covariances							
Involvement	<-->	Attendance	0.016***	0.004	.517	.566	.424
Involvement	<-->	Income	0.028**	0.011	.192	.150	.080
Income	<-->	Education	1.351***	0.365	.167	.180	.128
Attendance	<-->	Income	0.091***	0.026	.178	.209	.047
Attendance	<-->	Education	0.458***	0.094	.260	.254	.009**
Model for satisfaction and enjoyment							
Theatre benefit	<--->	Involvement	1.247**	0.497	.299		
Theatre benefit	<--->	Attendance	-0.228*	0.103	-.192		
Satisfaction/enjoyment	<--->	Theatre Benefit	1.432***	0.202	.459		
Satisfaction/enjoyment	<--->	Involvement	0.088	1.150	.007		
Satisfaction/enjoyment	<--->	Attendance	-0.440	0.248	-.119		
Satisfaction/enjoyment	<--->	Involvement	1.786*		.137		
		(indirect effect)					
Satisfaction/enjoyment	<--->	Attendance	-0.327		-.088		
		(indirect effect)					
Model for hedonic well-being							
Theatre benefit	<--->	Involvement	1.003*	0.428	.253	.416	.122**
Theatre benefit	<--->	Attendance	-0.174	0.090	-.155	-.287	.119**
Hedonic well-being	<--->	Theatre benefit	0.358***	0.083	.294	.323	.272
Hedonic well-being	<--->	Involvement	0.542	0.445	.112	.138	.216
Hedonic well-being	<--->	Attendance	0.165	0.096	.120		
Hedonic well-being	<--->	Involvement	0.359*		.074		
		(indirect effect)					
Hedonic well-being	<--->	Attendance	-0.062		-.045		
		(indirect effect)					
Model for psychological well-being							
Theatre benefit	<--->	Involvement	0.841*	0.403	.205	.564	.145**
Theatre benefit	<--->	Attendance	-0.131	0.080	-.122	-.378	.111**
Psychological well-being	<--->	Involvement	6.669	5.858	.093		
Psychological well-being	<--->	Theatre benefit	3.343***	1.000	.191	.193	.332
Psychological well-being	<--->	Attendance	3.091*	1.204	.164	.206	-.020*
Psychological well-being	<--->	Involvement	2.812		.039		
		(indirect effect)					
Psychological well-being	<--->	Attendance	-0.437		-.023		
		(indirect effect)					
Model for social functioning							
Theatre benefit	<--->	Involvement	0.857*	0.392	.226	.331	.063*
Theatre benefit	<--->	Attendance	-0.140	0.081	-.135	-.229	.135*
Social functioning	<--->	Theatre Benefit	1.765***	0.326	.367	.321	.493
Social functioning	<--->	Involvement	-1.153	1.618	-.063		
Social functioning	<--->	Attendance	1.240***	0.357	.247	.227	.107
Social functioning	<--->	Involvement	1.512*		.083		
		(indirect effect)					
Social functioning	<--->	Attendance	-0.248		-.049		
		(indirect effect)					

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ for regression weights. * $p < .05$ and ** $p < .01$ for age group differences.

had acceptable fit using conventional rules of thumb for at least two out of the three fit indices used. Figure 2 graphically depicts the model for psychological well-being, as the best-fitting exemplar. The others are the same in terms of

the paths tested. Theatre Benefit was significantly and positively related to each well-being construct and Satisfaction/enjoyment. There was no significant direct path between the Involvement construct (volunteerism and philanthropy)



Notes: Starred coefficients are non-significant. Error indicators are left out of model for simplicity of presentation.

Figure 2. Structural model for theatre involvement and benefit related to psychological well-being showing standardized coefficients.

and any well-being construct. The direct paths between Involvement and Theatre Benefit were all significant, and there was a significant indirect effect of Involvement through Theatre Benefit with all well-being constructs except Psychological Well-being. In other words, higher involvement was related to greater benefits (experience of flow, social engagement, and belonging), which in turn was related to higher well-being and satisfaction/enjoyment. There was a significant direct path between Attendance and Psychological Well-being, and between Attendance and Social Functioning, but not for Enjoyment/Satisfaction or Hedonic Well-being. The direct paths from Attendance to Theatre Benefit were nonsignificant except for the Hedonic Well-being model; in that case the coefficient was $-.19$, $p = .027$. In no case was there a significant indirect effect for Attendance on a well-being construct.

The pattern of these structural models supports Hypothesis 1 that there is a direct relationship between theatre involvement (philanthropy and volunteering) and experiencing psychosocial benefit at the theatre, and that psychosocial benefit is related to well-being. The hypothesis of an indirect effect of involvement on well-being was partially supported. Attendance (frequency or subscriber status) was correlated with involvement, unrelated to theatre benefit or hedonic well-being, but related to psychological and social function.

Hypothesis 2: Age Differences in Theatre Participation and Model Parameters

Participants younger than 65 years reported more satisfaction and enjoyment and more sense of flow during performances, but similar social engagement and sense of belonging while at the theatre to that reported by the older age group (see Table 2). There were few age group differences in well-being, but the older group reported higher levels of autonomy, environmental mastery, and self-acceptance. Older adults had higher percentages of volunteering, philanthropy, and subscribing, but only subscribing was significantly different, 75.7% versus 43.1%, $\chi^2(1) = 36.54$, $p < .001$. The younger and older groups did not differ significantly in the distribution of income, but the over-65

group had significantly more years of education. To test the first part of Hypothesis 2, we calculated an involvement scale by summing dichotomous indicators of subscribing and philanthropy plus attendance and volunteer hours grouped by quartiles—this scale ranged from 0 to 10 with a mean value of 3.15 ($SD = 1.85$). We compared the young and older groups on this scale, controlling for education, using a univariate analysis of covariance model. The main effect for age group remained significant, $F(1,493) = 25.26$, $p < .001$, with education accounted for. As hypothesized, older adults were more involved with the organization, $M = 4.02$ ($SD = 1.85$) versus 2.90 ($SD = 1.77$).

There was a significant age group difference for all structural models except for the one for satisfaction/enjoyment. The standardized regression weights for the young and old groups are shown in the right two columns of Table 4. The path-by-path comparisons demonstrate an overall pattern of age moderation for the relationship of attendance and involvement with theatre benefit, but not for the relationship between theatre involvement/attendance and well-being. The pattern of findings suggests that for older adults, there is a weaker relationship between level of involvement as measured by philanthropy and volunteering and the benefits derived from being part of a theatre audience, but the relationship between benefits and well-being is as strong as for younger adults. For younger adults, there was actually a *negative* relationship between attendance and theatre benefit, compared to a positive relationship for older adults.

Qualitative Results

The focus groups yielded a rich variety of theatre stories and memories. Here, we discuss only the themes and connections that relate directly to our hypotheses regarding psychological motivations and benefits of theatre involvement. The focus group participants were highly involved with Actors Theatre. Participants had “subscribed for years and years,” been “involved since the first era,” attended “since I was 18,” or “through several husbands,” “lending my time, a little bit of talent, and a little bit of treasury.” Participants considered this institution of such value and impact that their time and money were well spent to support the continuing efforts to maintain its high standards and place in the community. They spoke about the value of being a subscriber: experiencing regular performances, pre-planning date nights, and being exposed to “plays that you would not otherwise see.”

Belonging and social connectedness

Discussions revealed clear connections between theatre involvement and our hypothesized psychological benefits of belonging and social connectedness, especially social engagement. Participants reported that they attended with significant others, children, grandchildren, parents, other family members, neighbors, friends, members of their church, and coworkers. Stories included being introduced

to the theatre at a young age by family members, discovering theatre as adults, invited by coworkers, friends, or significant others, and striking up conversations with strangers seated around them or in the lobby before and after a show or during intermission. One participant described the friendship that she developed with a couple who had season seats next to hers, noting that “having someone that you see the play with, whether it’s your cousin or the stranger that you see every play really counts for something with me.” Another said that she liked simply being around people, even found it “enjoyable to just sit there and watch people come in and sit down.” Several appreciated being part of a diverse audience in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and background—and enjoyed the conversations and seeing and hearing different reactions. “It gives me a different perspective on ... people and how they react to things. I think live theater is like no other form of entertainment. The audience interaction and people who are there, I love it.” “[T]he audience is part of my appreciation of the play.”

Focus group participants spoke lovingly of the community and sense of belonging within the theater. One spoke about the “cozy” feeling of being involved with the former resident company that felt like “family.” Personal connections appeared to be important in developing this sense of belonging: many shared salient memories of interactions with actors and administrators, during performances and in community settings. One participant pointed to the importance of audience participation and responses during performances, saying “you consider yourself a part of the whole show.” Discussions about volunteer activities included comments about the connections developed, the sense of being a part of a team and of supporting a valued community resource.

Flow

Flow experiences are thought to be promoted by a balance of challenge and individual skill. Many participants preferred performances that challenged, surprised, and informed, and expressed weariness with annual performances of holiday plays unless they were staged in novel ways. The sense of timelessness associated with flow was described by one participant in reference to an unusual performance that “took you out of your usual theater experience—it took you out of your own head.” Another recalled being taken “out of myself.” Others described being present in the moment and enjoying plays unfold, or used words like “fascinating,” “enthralled,” and “electrifying” to describe memorable performances.

Well-being themes

Themes of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being emerged frequently. “It’s emotionally and intellectually stimulating at its best. ...and then it’s social and lovely!” Laughter, joy, excitement, and fascination were repeated themes. Performances were remembered as fun, enjoyable, lively, and entertaining. Feelings associated with the theater were

summarized with words such as “happy,” “love,” “great,” and “heartwarming.” One woman had experienced “a physical positive reaction to walking into a theater ... very exciting to come into a theatre as the audience is coming in.” These feelings extended beyond the final curtain: “I get to go home and think about what a good time I had.” Participants repeatedly spoke about anticipating new or favorite performances, special events, the start of each new season, and bringing friends with them to share their love of theatre. “As soon as the tickets come, we get out the calendar and we put all the dates on there.”

The social impact of attending the theater clearly emerged. Plays provoked “vigorous debates” and “heated discussions” that often continued for days after the play. “As far as well-being goes, it is a great thing for a marriage because you get a chance to read about a play ahead of time ..., you get to watch it together, you get to discuss it. Go home and talk about it or have dinner afterwards so it becomes this whole other enhanced experience ... that increases the well-being of both you and your spouse and your marriage.” Participants spoke about attending plays with children and the quality of conversations that followed. One woman reported attending a play for the first time with a friend as a “sort of wild thing to do,” bonding over the new experience of leaving their husbands and children at home. One woman confided, “It keeps you around people and for me, it gets me out of the house, it gets me around other people that I might not ordinarily be around.”

Volunteering promoted a sense of purpose. Several felt their volunteering was rewarding, meaningful, and of real “value and impact” to the community. They felt “a real honor, ... a responsibility” to help the theater thrive. Theater involvement was an integral part of many lives; one woman’s commitment after years of subscribing led her to plan to become an usher if she could no longer afford tickets. “You have to eat, you have to exercise, you go to the theater.” One mentioned the “invitation to imagine” that enhances well-being, “mentally and spiritually, intellectually and maybe even physically.” The different life perspectives encountered also enhanced meaning: “theater is an opportunity to reflect on the human condition ... it adds to your sense of perspective,” “theater allows you to have a bird’s eye view of the human condition,” and “I get to live vicariously through the theater.” Theater attendance is “a transformative experience” and “there’s a magic about it that is ... fulfilling and healthy.”

Looking for contradictory themes, we asked participants to recall negative experiences. Most identified times when they were bored or disliked a play or performance. However, they reported that plays were meaningful even when not enjoyable, and they talked of sharing laughter and critiques of plays that they were not fond of with friends and partners. Throughout the discussions, participants appeared to savor the experience of analyzing what they liked and disliked, speaking at length about plays or productions they hated. Thus, it appeared that participants

valued even the negative aspects of performances, viewing them as integral to their participation or learning opportunities.

Discussion

Our purpose was to evaluate a model of well-being associated with theatre audience involvement, and to examine age differences in involvement and benefits. We hypothesized that greater involvement would correlate with benefits of social engagement, a sense of belonging, and experiencing flow, and that these would be associated with greater enjoyment and satisfaction as well as greater social, psychological, and affective well-being. Our quantitative analyses of this model with a multiaged sample supported this hypothesis. Increased involvement through philanthropy and volunteering was associated with psychosocial benefits that, in turn, were linked to higher well-being, as depicted in Figure 1.

Contrary to our hypothesis, attending frequently and subscribing were directly related to psychological and social well-being, but they were not associated with the mediating construct of psychosocial benefits. This finding in the full sample is likely due to age differences in how involvement was linked to benefit. As hypothesized, older adults had higher levels of involvement than younger ones, but the relationship between involvement and the benefits of belonging, social engagement, and flow was weaker for the older than younger sample. For older adults, attending and subscribing showed positive psychosocial benefits, whereas younger adults showed a *negative* relationship between attendance and benefits. Perhaps this latter finding could be related to a novelty effect for younger members of the under-65 cohort, which would inevitably diminish with increased attendance. For all ages, achieving higher psychosocial benefit via attendance was related to higher well-being and enjoyment of theatre. Greater institutional involvement in the form of philanthropy or volunteering may be even more important for younger adults to experience greater engagement, belonging, and flow, whereas there may be enduring benefits for older adults from lifelong involvement such that even as involvement diminishes, benefits remain just by attending. These age differences are consistent with well-established motivational differences that lead younger adults to seek new social connections and experiences, whereas older adults seek meaning and positivity through established relationships (Carstensen, Fung, & Charles, 2003).

Our older focus group participants provided rich elaboration of the themes in our conceptual model. These highly involved individuals easily articulated the benefits of social engagement, belonging, and intellectual stimulation. They connected their theatre participation with positive affect and relationship well-being. The strongest and most reliable themes reflected social engagement, belonging, and social well-being. Whereas these benefits might pertain to

involvement in any organization, conversation in the focus groups elaborated opportunities unique to theatre, including the magic of live performance, the visceral connection to actors, the awareness that each performance was different, and the memories of both beloved and unpopular performances. As a live art, theatre depends on the interaction between performer and audience; our older sample was keenly aware of its role in this dynamic interchange and the resulting benefits of their participation.

Limitations

Mainstream theatre audiences are known to be selectively White, well-educated, and affluent (NEA, 2013), and this sample conformed to that expectation. The participants were wealthier, more educated, and less ethnically diverse than the general population, although we did find reasonable variation in education and income in our sample. The sample was further selected, as is typical in survey research, by their willingness to complete an online survey; most likely respondents had higher levels of commitment to the theatre organization and had more free time than the population from whom they were drawn. Nevertheless, we achieved sufficient variability on our key conceptual variables to test the hypotheses. Research on diverse samples' arts involvement is lacking; our findings of age group differences suggests that achieving benefits such as sense of belonging, social engagement, and flow may arise from different types of connection to an organization for different demographic groups, perhaps pointing to a direction for future research. The cross-sectional nature of the sample limits conclusions on the direction of the relationships found, and we are unable to fully account for the known benefits of lifelong socioeconomic privilege regardless of the type and amount of arts involvement. Another limitation was having no uninvolved comparison sample. Drawing the participants from a single organization leaves questions about how these participants compare to those not associated with any arts organization, or with a different kind of one. Our focus group participants left us with interesting hypotheses about the uniqueness of theatre involvement to be pursued in future research.

Implications

These cross-sectional findings support a model of well-being related to the psychosocial benefits of higher social engagement, belonging, and flow achieved through engagement with a regional theatre. This model could lead to further investigation of the benefits of arts involvement in diverse samples, using longitudinal or experimental designs that can tease apart privilege and benefit. One motivation for this study was to explore the potential impact of declining theatre participation in younger generations. Our qualitative findings underscore the richness of experience that might be lost on younger generations if they participate less.

They highlight the inherently social and dynamic nature of attending live theatre, but suggest that there are age differences in the type of connections that lead to psychosocial benefits of attending. Gerontological research on changing social-emotional motivations may provide clues as to how older versus younger audiences may be drawn into the theatre. Although questions about diverse characteristics of modern audiences remain to be explored, our findings suggest that it will be beneficial to explore these characteristics in terms of promoting psychological benefits such as a sense of belonging, social engagement, and flow, and not simply from an economic or marketing perspective. For the older adults we studied, attending theatre is a significant component of a life well-lived. As focus group participants forcefully articulated, such psychosocial benefits contribute to a larger sense of community and pride of place, connecting individual well-being to community well-being.

Funding

This project was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, Grant #15-3800-7007.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to express their appreciation of Actors Theatre of Louisville, especially Jennifer Bielstein, Justin Williamson, Danielle Manley, Erin Meiman, and Steven Knight, for their support.

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