AUDIENCE HABITS AND PREFERENCES FOR STREAMING AND THEATER-

GOING IN THE AGE OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND

By

TARYN R. VALENTINE

Bachelor of Arts in English, Screen Studies

Bachelor of Arts in Multimedia Journalism

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, OK

2019

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
July, 2021

AUDIENCE HABITS AND PREFERENCES FOR
STREAMING AND THEATER-GOING IN THE
AGE OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND

Thesis Approved:

Dr. John McGuire
Thesis Adviser

Dr. Jared Johnson

Dr. Lori McKinnon

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the faculty at Oklahoma State's School of Media and Strategic Communication. Graduate school was not something I thought I was capable of, and only through their support and guidance, I am where I am today. To my committee members, John McGuire, Jared Johnson, and Lori McKinnon, thank you for your critiques and suggestions. I would be amiss to not thank Mikyeung Bae, who helped me so much in the beginning stages of this thesis. To my fellow mass communication cohorts, thank you for fostering a supportive and truly enjoyable academic environment, it was a pleasure to collaborate with all of you.

Thank you to my chosen family. There are far too many of you to list here, but you know who you are. Without these people in my life, I would not have the strength and determination to accomplish all that I have. These friends have been by my side through my ups and downs, and for that I am forever grateful. Thank you all for reminding me to celebrate my victories, and to learn from my mistakes.

Name: TARYN VALENTINE

Date of Degree: JULY, 2021

Title of Study: AUDIENCE HABITS AND PREFERENCES FOR STREAMING AND THEATER-GOING IN THE AGE OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND

Major Field: MASS COMMUNICATION

Abstract: This research sought to understand the perceived substitutability between theater-going and streaming in terms of big-budget blockbusters through focus groups consisting of participants 18-to-24 years old who are frequent video streamers and movie theater-goers. The study found participants did not perceive going to the movie theater and streaming movies at home as substitutes for each other. The theatrical experience, as described by participants, was highly valued and not easily or satisfactorily replicated at home. Participants also viewed watching movies, whether at the theater or at home, as a social experience that should primarily be done in groups. Additionally, action films part of big-budget franchises were reported to be the main type of film drawing participants to the movie theater, whereas smaller, indie films were seen as films to stream at home. The implications of this research are far reaching, as the pandemic caused a restructuring of the film and theater industry to accommodate streaming, audiences have increased their streaming and become accustomed to seeing new release films at home. This research will help industry professionals plan the types of films to release in theaters versus on streaming platforms. Also, this research points to a resurgence in theater attendance as more big-budget action films are released in the summer of 2021.
Keywords: streaming, theater-going, movies, substitutability, uses and gratifications

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

COVID-19 AND ITS EFFECTS ON MOVIE-THEATER ATTENDANCE AND AT-
HOME STREAMING

The global pandemic altered many aspects of life, including the way people consume big-budget studio films. The film industry was greatly impacted by the effects of worldwide shutdowns, social distancing, and quarantining protocols that persisted from March of 2020 and much of 2021. The movie theater and home entertainment industries made a record $101 billion in global revenue during 2019 (Escandon, 2020). However, global box office totals fell 71% in 2020, largely due to the pandemic (Rubin, 2021). When looking at the American box office specifically, domestic revenue fell from $11.4 billion in 2019 to $2.2 billion in 2020 (McClintock, 2020). Conversely, profits from online video usage, (e.g., premium video on demand (VOD) rentals, online transactional purchases, and subscription fees) increased 30% in 2020, totaling $34 billion in revenue (Ramachandran, 2020). It is clear streaming has become an increasingly popular aspect of media consumption during the pandemic as Nielsen Global Media reported 25% of all time spent using television was through streaming platforms, and 25% of consumers have purchased an additional streaming service over the summer (Nielsen, 2020). As streaming media become more popular, corporations have had to focus their attention to building these platforms and apps, curating content libraries, and producing new content to meet these online viewing demands, which were accelerated during the global pandemic. However, subscription-based models are less profitable than the traditional theatrical distribution method.

Therefore, tensions between audience preference and industry profits are at an all-time high. This research will investigate audience preference, specifically within a key demographic of 18-to-24-year-olds. Eighteen to 24-year-olds are the most likely to subscribe to at least one streaming platform, which makes them a key age group in steaming audience research (Edelman et al, 2020). Interestingly, this age group was not attending the theater significantly more than other age-groups prior to the pandemic. However, due to the limited access to theatrical viewing during 2020, demographic data of theatrical viewing is sparse. For this study, finding participants with streaming subscriptions in a targeted demographic group will inform further research including more age groups and levels of engagement with steaming media and theatrical viewing.

The chosen methodology for this research (focus groups) is malleable enough to identify general sentiments about the current industry trajectory, as well as uncovering more nuanced opinions and uses of these viewing options. This study, and subsequent research, is necessary for those creating and planning to distribute content following the traditional nationwide release of films in theaters. It could benefit all audiences of theatrical release and streaming media, if media corporations implement the findings. Uses and Gratification theory will be used as the theoretical lens of this study.

The rest of this thesis will cover the following: In Chapter 2, a literature review will focus on a history of theatrical distribution, as well as the much more recent history of streaming platforms and their rise in popularity. Previous research on audience preference using uses and gratification theory will be discussed, in addition to industry expert predictions and suggestions for film distribution. The chapter's final section will discuss the research questions being posed in this qualitative study. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed account of the focus group

methodology and research procedures to be used to investigate this research problem. The researcher will present themes derived from this focus group research in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will conclude by discussing key findings of the study, evaluating study limitations, as well as avenues for future investigation into streaming and movie theater-going preferences.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this section, the history of theatrical distribution will be discussed, focusing on (a) industrial standards for exhibition; (b) policies and practices that changed over time; (c) eventual conglomeration of studios; and (d) the current state of American movie theaters. The development of streaming video will be investigated, as well as its rise to popularity and current market state. The researcher will also provide a review of the development of uses and gratification theory will be analyzed and relevant studies using this theory in the context of theatrical and home entertainment.

A History of Movie Theaters and Streaming Media

For most of films' history, seeing a movie meant going to a movie theater. In America, early films were displayed in theatrical spaces originally intended for live performances, and often accompanied by variety shows and vaudeville acts (Gomery, 1991; Paul, 2016). As film became less of a novelty, and longer, narrative based films became popular around 1910, films themselves became the only attraction necessary to draw audiences to the movie theater (Gomery, 1991). Soon, so-called movie palaces were saturating the market, and major studios used division of labor to release hundreds of films each year (Lewis, 2008).

During Hollywood's classical period, which spanned from the late 1910s to the 1960s, a studio would produce a movie and that studio's theater chain would show the film in its first run, mostly in large, metropolitan areas (Gomery, 2000). The film would then be rented out to independent theaters and local theaters nationally and often, worldwide (Lewis, 2008). This system was designed by a small group of studios who controlled production, distribution, exhibition in order to artificially restrict competition, which is often referred to as *vertical integration* (Allen & Gomery, 1985). At this time, the big five film studios (Paramount, RKO, Fox, MGM, and Warner Bros.) owned more than 70% of first-run theaters (Lewis, 2008). Studios also enforced *block booking* and *blind bidding,* practices where studios sold theaters a group of films to exhibit, sight unseen (Hanssen, 2000). This meant theaters were forced to buy a slew of "B" films in order to get the reels for one, big-budget, star-powered film, in other words, theaters had to buy a package of unwanted content to get the one desired film in the bunch (Hanssen, 2000). This was a strategy studios used to control theaters, regardless of whether they were owned by the studio; however, some argue this was simply the most efficient and profitable way for films to make the studios and theaters maximum revenue (Hanssen, 2000). In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court decided this system was a monopoly, and forced studios to end block-booking practices, eventually requiring studios to sell their theaters (*United States v. Paramount Pictures*, 1948). In what became known as the Paramount Decision, the Supreme Court broke up the system of vertical integration, and which meant theaters and exhibition sites were independent and no longer owned and controlled by studios. This led to a restructuring of the film industry that had been financially successful throughout the Great Depression, and both

World Wars. Theaters and studios suffered losses after this decision, though these troubles were also attributed to urban flight, the baby boom, and the introduction of television (Gomery, 2000).

As television grew in popularity and Hollywood studios continued to struggle financially, studios decided to begin their relationship with television by selling back catalogs of films to air on television (Gomery, 1991; Lewis, 2008). The collaboration of film and television studios led to a more generalized entertainment industry, where conglomeration and synergy reigned. This new business model enabled more films to be financed, as well as experimentation in cutting edge techniques in an attempt to draw audiences back to the theaters (Lewis, 2008). At this time, censorship in the film industry was facing intense pushback, and in an attempt to lure audiences to the theaters, films were released in theaters without the seal of approval from the Production Code Administration. These films with more mature content did increase theater profits immensely, and led to a shake-up in Hollywood practices to accommodate the demand of the American public. This cultural shift also served to replace the Motion Picture Production Code that had been in effect since the early 1930s with the voluntary, four-level, rating system still in effect (Lewis, 2008). Thus, began the era of synergy with similar leisure and entertainment industries, such as the music, books, television and more. President Ronald Reagan's deregulation policies in the 1980s made conglomeration easier, and the big Hollywood studios became even larger, with more control over the industry than they ever did before the Paramount Decision. This led to studios developing vertical relationships in the industry, as well as horizontal relationships. In 1985, the Paramount Decision was essentially overturned in *United States v. Capitol Services,* in which four theater chains were on trial for their collusion to not outbid each other and maintain control of 90% of theaters in Milwaukee, WI (Lewis, 2008 & *United States v. Capitol Services,* 1985). The high court ruled in favor of the studios, because

these practices limit competition and the licensing revenues studios receive. This decision was a blow to theaters, as these practices ensured exhibition chains' survival, and within a year of this decision, over 4,000 theaters in the United States were bought out by studios (Lewis, 2008).

In this new age of Hollywood, films weren't expected to make profits just off theatrical exhibition, there was money to be made in television, video cassette recording (VCR), digital video disc (DVD), merchandise, video games, and music as well (Gomery, 2000). Ironically, the Hollywood studios first saw VCR technologies as a threat, and Disney and Universal attempted to sue Sony over Betamax videotapes potential for copyright violation, and subsequently, financial losses for the studios (Lewis, 2008). Eventually, Hollywood moguls adapted distribution strategies to capitalize on these new technological advancements and by 1986, VCR sales bypassed the Hollywood movie theater box office sales (Gomery, 2000). These synergies and corporate restructuring did yield high profits and, diversifying and conglomeration proved to save the once failing Hollywood studios, but eventually led to the dot.com bubble of the late 1990s (Hesmondhalgh, 2019). This also created an interconnection system of dependence that was more far reaching than ever before. By the mid 2000s, six corporations (Time Warner, Disney, News Corporation, Sony, Viacom and General Electric) owned most of the media production, distribution, and exhibition in the United States (Lewis, 2008). During this time, a films' financial success can largely be determined by its release saturation, or nationwide release and its profits during its first week in theaters. While synergy revenue was still sought after, theaters remained the most important aspect of film in the eyes of the studios. The internet posed a cost-effective channel of distribution, but also posed a risk in terms of file-sharing, piracy, and copy-right infringement (Lewis, 2008).

For years, the typical theatrical window ensured movie theaters and studios made their money while restricting access to their film to great demand. After the films' theatrical run, studios would hold the film for 90 days until its at-home release via VHS, DVD, or Blu-Ray, and eventually, the rights would be sold to television channels. This *windowing model* ensured films would be released to channels "according to the income that each can generate, from high to low" (Gaustad, 2019, p. 68). This timeline was applied to most big-budget films, although some films would be released straight to DVD or on television depending on a variety of factors. That is, until streaming video became popular, and especially due to streaming platforms' move to create their own content. Essentially, theatrical distribution is a high-yielding channel for films, and currently, we're seeing an increase circumventing this channel or limiting it by making the same content available on low-yielding channels.

Lotz identifies digital video recorders (DVRs) and the internet as a catalyst for the fast-paced technological changes impacted the way Americans consumed television and films at home (2018). Others note the launch of YouTube in 2005 as the "most significant breakthrough for video streaming" (Spilker & Colbjørnsen, 2020, p. 1213). While YouTube was first successful online video streaming site, it had not provided feature films for rent until 2010, and still mainly consists of user-generated content. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 also fed into the shift to online streaming by allowing "cable providers to offer phone service and phone providers to offer video services" (Lotz, 2018, p. 12). This legislation was an attempt to generate more competition in cable, and by the early 2000s, this goal had been achieved. Streaming media, or VOD originated in the early 2000s when Verizon launched its Fios video service, AT&T released its U-verse video service, and iTunes started its digital video download program (Lotz, 2018). These additions to cable made available via the internet, in addition to the debut of

Netflix's streaming platform and Hulu started a cord-cutting revolution. It is important to note streaming services were tied to cable and television early on, and it wasn't until Netflix created its first feature film in 2015, that streaming platforms hedged into the theatrical exhibition industries territory. Netflix began as a DVD mailing rental service in 1998, and while Netflix, Hulu, HBO Go, and Amazon Video hosted films on their sites, these practices did not pose a threat to theaters until the pandemic. Some tension occurred in the industry when Netflix originals were nominated for Academy Awards, and officials scoffed at the idea of a film being considered for these awards that had not seen a theatrical release. In response, Netflix debuted nominated films in select theaters for short windows of time to dispel such criticisms.

Much like studios' back catalogs began to populate over-the-air and cable television in the 20th century, streaming services of the 21st century rely heavily on libraries of existing content to keep subscribers satiated. Audiences noted a large library of content and exclusive content as primary reasons for subscribing to particular streaming platforms (Edelman et al., 2020). By acquiring rights to existing content as well as producing original content, streaming platforms were able to meet audiences demands for streaming material. However, when streaming platforms proved to be financially viable, the legacy media conglomerates sought to create their own streaming platforms to cash in on the trend. By November of 2019, Disney had launched Disney+, a streaming platform featuring exclusive Disney content, and proceeded to create content exclusively for Disney+. Other legacy media corporations moved to create their own streaming platforms, and Apple TV+, and Peacock (NBCUniversal), and Paramount+ (ViacomCBS) debuted shortly after. This push for streaming platforms came at the perfect time, as mere months after the launch of Disney+, COVID-19 was identified and caused lockdowns, restrictions, and cultural changes worldwide.

Market Models

      The years 2020 and 2021 proved to be an exercise in trial and error in the sense of film distribution, and a handful of models emerged which proved to be financially successful. Following theater shutdowns, media conglomerates increasingly used streaming platforms to distribute big-budget films that would have otherwise saw a nationwide theatrical release if it weren't for the ongoing pandemic. Early on in the pandemic, many big-budget films were released on streaming platforms, and were packaged as *premium rentals*, where they were available to view for a 24-hour period at a price point ranging from $19.99 to $29.99. Apple TV, Disney+, and Amazon Prime were the predominate platforms implementing this strategy. This proved to be financially advantageous for some films, such as *Trolls 2: World Tour* which grossed $100 million in three weeks on Apple TV as a 24-hour rental (Schwartzel, 2020).

      The nationwide theater shutdown at the beginning of the global pandemic caused release dates of many big-budget films to be pushed back, and when theaters slowly started re-opening, there was a severe lack of content, as well as audiences being unwilling to make a trip to the local movie theater (Sperling & Barnes, 2020). Some individuals interviewed said they feared for their own safety at the theaters, expressing concern that other patrons wouldn't follow the COVID-19 safety precautions, like wearing masks and social distancing (Rubin, 2020). Other individuals said they drove across state lines just to see *New Mutants* (2020)*,* and would do it again if their local theaters remained closed (Rubin, 2020). A trend in responses was that younger interviewees (under 28 years of age) all had plans to see films in the theater or had already made a trip to the theater since they had reopened. Interviewees age 28 years or older erred on the side caution and expressed their unwillingness to risk their health and the health of others by going to the movies (Rubin, 2020).

Although some studios chose to delay releasing big-budget films (e.g., the latest James Bond film *No Time to Die*, originally set for release in April 2020), they eventually remained true to traditional distribution channels by releasing the films in theaters exclusively for several weeks. The most notable example of this strategy was Christopher Nolan's *Tenet,* produced by Warner Bros. (owned by Warner Media) at a cost of $200 million, but saw disappointing domestic box office profits, earning only $45.1 million domestically (Mendelson, 2020; Sperling & Barnes, 2020). In response to the poor box office performance of *Tenet,* Warner Media announced a new theatrical release model: its 2021 catalog of films would be released simultaneously in theaters and on their streaming platform, HBOMax; both Warner Bros. and HBOMax are owned by AT&T (Barnes, 2020). This particular venture into streaming as a first-run distribution site will serve as a case study in this investigation, as this model is one of the first attempts to create a long-term plan for distribution in the pandemic.

Shortly before Warner Media announced its new model, AMC Theaters negotiated a deal with Universal in order to maintain a mutually beneficial partnership and ensure Universal was unable to move to an entirely streaming based model (Aron & Langley, 2020). Comcast subsidiaries Universal and Focus Features have entered a multiyear contract with AMC that grants three weekends of theatrical exclusivity for all films produced by these studios, while simultaneously releasing these films on premium video-on-demand (PVOD) platforms (Aron & Langley, 2020). This decision was reached in part to maintain Comcast's partnership with AMC, which was jeopardized after Universal expressed a desire to release films exclusively on streaming platforms and in turn prompted AMC to threaten to stop booking Universal films for their theaters (Sperling, 2020). This was also an attempt to lower marketing costs and capitalize on the profits of video on demand, of which AMC would share as their VOD platform would

host some of these films (Sperling, 2020). AMC CEO Adam Aron called this deal "historic" and asserted his belief that "movie-goers will come to our theaters in huge numbers in a post-pandemic world" (Aron & Langley, 2020, para. 5). This contract was finalized in July, and similar contracts with Cineplex, and Cinemark followed shortly thereafter (Sperling, 2020). These contracts shortened the typical three-month gap between theatrical exclusivity and streaming premieres. However, this deal was a financial security blanket for AMC and other exhibition companies, as they braced for the low theater attendance projections for 2021, and the increased popularity of PVOD and streaming platforms (Sperling, 2020.

Likewise, AT&T created a new distribution channel for its big-budget content, the likes of which have traditionally been released in theaters exclusively for an extended period of time before being accessible through other channels. This model, which the researcher will refer to as a *branched distribution strategy*, was unlike the traditional distribution model which followed a linear and staged release of films, in which theater's hold exclusive exhibition rights for a period of time, followed by a withholding period where the film is not released in theaters or for home viewing, and finally, the film is released on DVD and on streaming platforms. Even though this new model was created to be a short-term solution to the circumstances COVID-19 manifested, the ramifications on distribution channels could persist long after the global pandemic.

These forced shifts in film distribution were a long time coming for some, however, as many industry professionals clinged to traditional theatrical exhibition. For those who have spelled the end to traditional theatrical releases, Warner Bros' decision heralded a new age of streaming as a primary distribution channel and the subsequent demise of the traditional theatrical exhibition model. Large exhibition chains have been able to sustain themselves by restructuring debt, showing back catalog films at a reduced capacity, and securing exhibition

contracts with studios that allow for synchronized releases of new films on streaming platforms and in theaters for a limited window of time, but expected to return to business as usual by 2022 (Sperling & Barnes, 2020). It seemed exhibition companies were finally realizing the impact over-the-top (OTT) streaming platforms have on theatrical exhibition, and taking the threat more seriously than ever.

This is all to say that while audiences are already accustomed to using streaming as a means to consume big-budget films, having at-home access to big-budget films as soon as they are released is all new territory. This shift pointed to an increasingly individualistic consumption model, and could lead to understanding the home as a primary location for big-budget film consumption. Films that cost hundreds of millions of dollars to produce require certain profit margins to earn back production and marketing costs. Studios, filmmakers, and theaters are all anxious to maximize box-office revenue. In order to get their piece of the pie, theaters need to remain the primary site for big-budget film consumption. Theaters had been struggling to stay afloat for years, as American movie theater attendance in America fell 4.6% from 2018 to 2019, a percentage that was substantially higher than declines in previous years (Hayden, 2020). Without content enticing audiences to the theaters, paired with the social distancing protocol limiting the number of patrons allowed in each theater per showing, theaters were now in greater jeopardy now more than ever before (Whitten, 2020).

The media industry is currently in a restructuring phase in an attempt to mitigate the financial struggles the pandemic caused. Additionally, the Paramount Decision was opened to review in 2018, and eventually overturned in 2020, which further opened the door to studios and theaters merging going forward (Gardner, 2020). Combined with the tension between studios,

theaters, and the role of streaming platforms exacerbated by the pandemic, the implications for overturning this decision will be far reaching.

Uses and Gratifications

The theoretical framework guiding this research is uses and gratifications theory as it presupposes audiences actively select media that will satisfy their needs (Rubin, 1981). Uses and gratifications theory focuses on individual media use and audience choice, while also addressing a variety of needs audience seek to have met through media, and how these needs can differ between mediums, which is essential for research into audiences' media preferences (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). At the core of uses and gratifications theory are *motivations*, or the reasons and intended outcomes for consuming particular media and *audience activity*, which "refers to the utility, intentionality, selectivity, and involvement of the audience with the media" (Bondad-Brown et al, 2012, p. 474). While motivations have been identified in the selection and gratification of particular medium, some argue these lists of motivations are not standard.

Uses and gratifications theory originated in the 1940s, when Herta Herzog investigated female listeners and non-listeners of soaps, or radio serials, and how this content was integrated into their daily lives (Herzog, 1941). Herzog found emotional release, wishful thinking and valuable advice as gratifications of listening to such programs (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Over time, significant updates to this theory were made when researchers applied this theory to new technologies, such as television (Katz et al, 1973; Rubin 1981) and the internet (Ruggiero, 2000).

Katz et al. noted early uses and gratifications research had shortcomings, especially in terms of identifying the psychological or sociological origins of the gratifications discovered. However, at the time the research was conducted, a model for uses and gratifications framework had been established. This model noted the audience as active in media selection, who are

14

responsible for linking the media choice with a gratification sought, which they have the capacity to address and self-report, and researchers should avoid value judgements when discussing certain media (Katz et al. 1973).

Rubin's (1981) study investigated viewing motivations, viewing behaviors and attitudes, specifically related to preferred television programs. This study was an attempt to expand previous uses and gratifications research, primarily viewing motivation categories. These motivations were adapted from previous research and a survey featuring 30 questions which were divided then into 9 overarching categories: (a) program content, (b) entertainment, (c) relaxation, (d) pass time/habits, (e) informational, (f) escape, (g) arousal, (h) companionship, and (i) social interaction (Rubin, 1981). Participants who identified high levels of identification with the aforementioned motivations for television viewing reported watching more television than participants with low levels of identification with the viewing motives (Rubin, 1981).

Ruggiero (2000) argued the rise of computer mediated communications has prompted more research in uses and gratifications research to study the interactive, demassified, and asynchronous nature of online communications. These features speak to an individual's control of said medium, as well as the time-shifting capabilities the internet offers. Ruggiero noted many early inquiries into the uses and gratifications derived from particular media was individualist and behaviorist, and could not be applied to the population in general. The qualities of internet communication still necessitate individual media use as a primary inquiry, however, the individuals reported or observed activity is now contextualized by more psychological and social sources (Ruggiero, 2000).

In their research, Sundar and Limperos (2013) built upon the idea that uses and gratifications theory can and should be applied to internet mass media. In this study, researchers

noted gratifications for new media are too similar to those for old media, and thus the nuances of the gratifications sought and obtained are missed (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). This study also affirmed the reality of the active audience, so much so, audience is usually substituted with users when discussing individuals accessing media via the internet. The researchers also stressed the importance of developing technology specific motivations, as not to limit potential motivations or appeals of the technology.

Previous studies have identified motives for television and film consumptions: (a) passing time; (b) relaxation; (c) companionship; (d) social interaction; (e) habit; (f) entertainment; (g) information; (h) arousal; and (i) escape (Cha & Chan-Olmsted, 2012). However, since streaming is an internet hosted medium, some research has suggested internet hosted video may gratify needs differently than traditional cable television (Cha & Chan-Olmsted, 2012). These studies were conducted before the proliferation of streaming. As streaming is ubiquitous in media consumption today, and internet hosted television is not significantly different than traditional cable due to the prevalence of time shifting and on demand qualities of both mediums.

Online Streaming and Television Media Consumption Habits and Preferences

A study conducted in the early days of streaming focused on audiences' "perceived substitutability between online video platforms and television" (Cha & Chan-Olmsted, 2012, p. 261). This study and others suppose audiences have a finite amount of time for consuming media, so when a new medium emerges, like streaming platforms, the assumption is audiences who adopt this new medium will spend less time consuming media via existing channels or disregarded these existing channels completely (Cha & Chan-Olmsted, 2012). While looking at usage from the technology side, it is argued a new medium will replace existing media when

16

functionally similar and/or more desirable. This line of thought is important when addressing the perceived replacement of theatrical viewing with streaming, as we need to understand whether audiences view streaming as a substitute for theatrical viewing.

Bondad-Brown et al. (2012) were interested in the differences in audience motivations between user-shared, online video content and traditional television viewing. They found these two medium were significantly different, and respondents tended to assess motivations for online video usage as "neutral or somewhat negative" (Bondad-Brown et al., 2012, p. 488). Motivations noted in this research included entertainment, information seeking, and companionship/social purposes. This could be attributed the emerging nature of online video content at the time this research was conducted, as questionnaires were distributed in 2009, before the widespread popularization of streaming platforms. This study, it is important to note, focused on online video shared between users, not streaming platforms specifically.

Research on factors affecting online streaming have identified age as a significant factor in adopting streaming technology, as participants under 35 were more likely to purchase subscriptions (Lee et al, 2018). This study found consumers below the age of 35 "are more open to the idea of purchasing online streaming services, while adults older than 35 are less likely to adopt them" (Lee et al., 2018, p. 21). Implications of this findings suggest young adults are an ideal research focus in streaming behavior, as they are more likely to subscribe to streaming services than individuals over the age of 35. Social trends, cost, media options, and ease of use have also been researched in terms of streaming media, and in this study, social trend and available options were influential in choosing streaming media over cable (Lee et al, 2018). This study directed legacy media and cable companies to adopt streaming technologies or become

more competitively priced lest they become obsolete, and it seems most major cable networks chose to cash in on the streaming platform trend.

While investigating motivations affecting television and streaming usage, streaming was noted to be associated with active audiences more so than traditional television. Researchers also noted evidence of social motivations in media use, which was suggested for future research (Tefertiller & Sheehan, 2019). One of the biggest limitations in this study were the researchers' issues with convergence. As streaming becomes more popular, and legacy media migrate their content to streaming platforms, the line between television and streaming content blurs. Nailing down what constitutes television is increasingly inconsistent between audiences as well as platforms; it seems as streaming is proliferated, everything will migrate to this internet hosted realm.

An investigation into the shift in consumption to streaming platforms as the most popular at-home video consumption method over DVD and Blu-Ray and this effect on feature film revenue streams in the Norwegian market took place between 2010 and 2016 (Gaustad, 2019). Overall revenue for feature films declined during this period, which made the financial success of a film more dependent on cinema releases than before. The researcher proposed shortening the theatrical window and/or limiting exclusivity could increase profits short-term, but warned these practices could lead to a leakage of audiences to streaming. An increase in streaming audiences could mean the film is more accessible and has the potential to reach more eyes, but if streaming became the preferred method for viewing, it would also mean lower earnings for theaters in the long run (Gaustad, 2019).

Tefertiller (2018) implemented Substitution theory while studying factors motivating audiences to turn to streaming and away from traditional cable or broadcast television. Like this

research, Tefertiller was seeking to understand how one medium is replaced by another. However, the addition of a new medium without discarding the older technology or media can be viewed as a complimentary process. Tefertiller (2018) found perceived substitutability was not a predicting factor of cord-cutting behaviors, rather the perceived advantages of streaming predicted cord-cutting. So, this research will seek to understand if the audience perceives streaming films as either a replacement or substitution for going to the movie theater, or if these mediums are complimentary. In other words, are participants streaming new films and going to the movie theater, or predominantly choosing one over the other? Additionally, the researcher will prompt focus group participants to discuss the differences and potential advantages of streaming movies at home or in the theaters.

Research on streaming and movie-going published since the beginning of the pandemic has focused on describing the current state of the market and projections for the future, as well as large-scale surveys of audiences' media usage. However, Lüders et al. (2021) investigated the content selection of video and audio streaming users of Norway, and found frequent video streaming users turn to more streaming platforms for a wider variety of content than non-frequent or sporadic streamers. These researchers categorized streaming users into sporadic, regular and frequent users, and focused on frequent users as these users were most likely to "portray patterns of use most markedly informed by logics of streaming services" (Lüders et al., 2021, p. 36).   Researchers claim these findings signal continued growth in video streaming, and discovered 49% of respondents were regular television streamers, and 25% were frequent television streamers (Lüders, et al., 2021). Additionally, young people (i.e.: adults under the age of 30) tended to be frequent video streamers.

Previous Research on Theater-Going Preferences, Motivations, and Experience

A study investigating motives for movie attendance in college students noted frequent movie goers have both a greater number and varying motives for attending the theaters than their non-frequent counterparts (Austin, 1986). Austin also found frequent movie-goers tended to be significantly younger than their non-frequent movie going counterparts. This study presupposed consumption was directly influenced by an audiences' needs, which are a formed around a culmination of intended or desired gratifications a medium is thought to provide (Austin, 1986). Austin focused on frequent and non-frequent movie-goers' on the front end of the decision-making processes, that is, what these individuals perceive to be their motivations/reasons for choosing to go to the movie theater to see a film. Conversely, this study did not seek to discover gratifications sought. When this study was conducted, research into movie-going behaviors and motivations was sparse, and due to the increased adoption of the internet, much of uses and gratifications research has been focused on this new medium. Austin noted the importance of comparing motivations of viewing movies in theaters versus in their homes via pay-per-view, HBO, and other cable channels. Since online streaming and theatrical attendance are increasingly interconnected, future research should be cognizant of the industrial and financial influences the two portals have on each other.

Research into factors motivating home viewing of a film versus attending the theater found audiences chose to see "exciting, visually enticing films" in theaters (Tefertiller, 2017, p. 27). This study is focused on an extremely similar problem to what is currently happening in the industry, and Tefertiller notes the popularity of abandoning traditional theatrical releases. Using uses and gratifications framework along with expectancy-value theory, this survey research found satisfaction with specific viewing environments contributed to an individuals' intention to

see a film in theaters (Tefertiller, 2017). Due to the immersive nature of the movie theater, gratifications are seemingly heightened and therefore, the perceived gratifications influence intention.

Tefertiller adapted a groundwork study, which noted the lack of uses and gratifications based research in film and movie-going, which surprised the researchers due to the popularity and social significance of film (Palmgreen et al., 1988). The researchers also noted film's superior diversionary qualities, which fulfill escape and entertainment motives more than other mediums. The researchers assume the experience of going to the movies is appealing, otherwise the less expensive at-home option (television) would have ran the movie theaters out of business. This research categorized participants' responses into gratifications sought and avoidance dimensions, and considered previously researched media gratification sources, media content, social context of consumption, and technological characteristics of film (Palmgreen et al., 1988). Tefertiller's (2017) study was based on the motivational framework for movie-going established in Palmgreen et al. (1988), especially the social aspect of movie-going. Researchers noted the college-aged participants were easily accessible for research and could help explain the strong social motivation dimension found. Factors discovered for movie-going avoidance were also of interest. Physical environmental constraints like being close to strangers, specific and often obscene or violent content, sensory discomfort, social environmental constraints like noisy audiences, and general content were all established as avoidance factors of movie-going (Palmgreen et al., 1988). These factors, particularly physical and social environmental constraints could be relevant to our research in film and streaming habits during the pandemic. The desire to avoid large groups due to the fear of contracting or spreading COVID-19 could very well play a role in the decision to stream content rather than go to a movie theater.

To further investigate the social aspect of theatrical viewing, and the gratifications audiences seek from this activity, a study was conducted testing social capital and FOMO, or the fear of missing out, as variables predicting social media sharing of a theatrical viewing experience (Tefertiller et al, 2020). FOMO has been studies as a predictor for binge-watching behaviors, or participation in so-called TV mega-events, while social capital has been linked to media consumption behaviors (Tefertiller et al, 2020). Combining these concepts with the social utility motivation of viewing a film in theaters, the researchers posited modern theater-going is akin to online consumption behaviors and these motivations could play a role in movie theater attendance, especially in viewing during an early release window. Researchers found a film's perceived social utility best predicted an individuals' intention to view the film in theaters, and these individuals expected gratifications included "social interaction and conversation with their friends and family after seeing the movie" (Tefertiller et al, 2020, p. 394). The researchers did not find a significant influence of FOMO and social capital on intention to view a film in theaters, which was rationalized by the lack of access to *second-screens*, or mobile devices within the theater. While these motivations are often associated with home-viewing habits, it may be prudent to include them in further research into online film streaming as a possible motivation to choose streaming over the theatrical setting.

Summary and Research Questions

Research focused on audience preferences, or uses and gratifications sought and achieved by audiences has been conducted in specific mediums. Research into radio, television, social media, internet-based viewing media, video games, and more has been conducted in the past, and these studies are the building blocks for this research. Instead of focusing on content, the examination of the platform or medium on which the content is consumed is the researchers'

prerogative. Essentially, this research focuses on the difference and similarities of the theater-going and at-home streaming experiences. Is streaming a comparable experience, or even a satisfying substitute for the theatrical viewing experience? Are the motivations behind these viewing experiences similar, or are there significant differences in motivations influencing either decision? Since simultaneous releases of films in theaters and on streaming platforms has become commonplace, the present study offers a unique opportunity to disregard content as a variable and hone in on the setting and viewing experience instead.

The theatrical exhibition system in America has been a longstanding tradition, but has been in jeopardy at times before the pandemic. While streaming is a relatively new technology, it has risen in popularity exponentially during the pandemic, leading for massive restructuring of the Hollywood studio system to shift resources to developing streaming platforms, as well as content for these platforms. To study audiences' preferences concerning streaming and/or traditional theatrical movie-going, a uses and gratifications approach will be taken. This assumes audiences are actively selecting their media and the technology by which they access the media to satisfy particular needs. Previous research into audience preferences regarding streaming (Cha & Chan-Olmsted, 2012; Bondad-Brown et al., 2012; Lee et al, 2018; Tefertiller & Sheehan, 2019; Gaustad, 2019) or theatrical viewing (Austin, 1986; Palmgreen et al., 1988; Tefertiller, 2017; Tefertiller et al, 2020) have been conducted, most of which using uses and gratifications as a guiding theory. These research questions were posed to understand the appeal of movie-going and streaming habits of people age 18-24, and if the viewing environment is more important to the individual than the content available. Essentially, are these modes of viewing big-budget studio films substitutes for one another, or are other factors influencing these decisions? Subsequently, two research questions are posed for this study.

RQ1: Is streaming a substitute for theatrical viewing for 18-24-year-olds?

RQ2: Do 18-24-year-olds prefer viewing big-budget films in theaters or at home?

Such factors could include fear of contracting COVID-19, cost, and personal preference. The participants desired will be self-proclaimed movie buffs and subscribe to at least one streaming service. These participants will be drawn from a college campus, for the ease of the researcher, as well as the age group (18 to 24-year-olds) that has been proven to be the most likely age group to subscribe to at least one streaming service (Edelman et al, 2020).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach chosen for this study

(focus group research) and how this approach is best suited for data collection purposes. This

chapter will also discuss the sample, procedure, and instrument (i.e., the questionnaire protocol)

that will be used. To follow, a detailed account of the proposed research design, sampling plan,

and data collection instruments will ensue. Next, the procedure and timeline of data collection

and analysis will be proposed. Finally, verification and credibility issues will be addressed.

Focus Group Research

While many studies into audience preference and motivations are conducted via surveys,

interviews, and habit mapping, this research will be accomplished through focus groups. By

conducting focus group sessions, participants are able to convey nuanced opinions about each

medium, and their enjoyment and uses of each. Focus group research was first implemented in

the 1940s, but was not widely adapted for media research until the 1980s (Gunter, 2000). The

advantage of focus group research is that participants can elaborate and contextualize their

preferences, experiences, and habits, as well as bounce ideas off other participants (Hansen et al.,

1998). By pinpointing common themes in these focus group sessions, researchers are able to

understand general attitudes and opinions on a topic (Hansen et al., 1998).

Focus group research is particularly helpful when studying audiences, especially as a technique to measure general perceptions and attitudes surrounding an issue as a starting point for further research (Gunter, 2000). Focus group research allows for customer motivations, attitudes and discourses to be revealed (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996) and most focus group research on audiences is focused on how individuals conceptualize, make sense of, and use specific media content, which is rooted in audience reception research (Gunter, 2000). This research will expand focus group research focus to encompass more than content, or big-budget films as a collective, it will focus on medium preference and habits. As the question of audience preferences of streaming and theatrical viewing of films is rather new, this method of research is useful for preliminary research into the issue.

By allowing a group to discuss an issue, in this case streaming and movie theater attendance habits and preferences, the issue is not framed by the moderator and the participants are mostly unrestricted in their discussion of the issue. The subject of streaming and theatrical viewing habits is fairly low stakes and even if extreme opinions on the matter are voiced, the chance of embarrassment or peer pressure is slim as this topic doesn't revolve around a polarizing political issue or require participants to disclose sensitive information about themselves. However, questions regarding media preferences changing due to the pandemic may be polarizing, but the moderator will ensure the topic stays on media usage, not political or personal views on the pandemic itself.

Previous focus group research has been conducted to measure audiences' perception of home viewing movies to understand whether individuals think of viewing movies at home via a VCR like television, or like theater viewing (Krugman et al., 1991). This study involved focus

groups sessions and surveys, which centered on viewing experiences, or how audiences perceive

watching movies with a VCR as well as how audiences structure their viewing environment

(Krugman et al., 1991). The focus group portion of this study was two-fold; the first three

sessions were used to understand viewing characteristics and activities of VCR movie watching

and television. These participants were asked to give in-depth descriptions of why they

associated VCR movie watching with either the theater experience or like watching television

programing. The second round of focus group sessions responded to the characteristics and

activities generated from the first three groups, and helped the researchers develop a scale to

compare VCR movie watching to both movie theater viewing and television viewing. The

implications of this study on this research is twofold; first, the method of focus groups

collaborating to compare and contrast movie watching behaviors in differing environments and

platforms is similar to the goals of this research. Secondly, it establishes activities associated

with theater viewing at home, and activities that negatively impact the perception of VCR

viewing being close to theater viewing (Krugman et al., 1991). The researchers noted

participants with higher incomes, and consequently, larger television screens and better audio-

video technology, were more likely to perceive VCR viewing as similar to viewing films at the

theater. Three aspects of VCR viewing (visual orientation, social interaction, and control)

influenced audiences' perception of the viewing experience, and should be considered when

researching perception of streaming movies at home compared to theater viewing (Krugman et

al., 1991).

By applying uses and gratifications theory to focus group research on audience

preferences regarding theatrically released films and streaming as a primary mode of consuming

new, big-budget films, we will not only contribute to the film industry, we will expand the uses and gratifications research into audience preference.

Subjects

Participants will be self-identified movie enthusiasts, whose ages fall within the range of 18-24, as this age group has the highest reported streaming service subscription rates out of any other age group (Edelman et al, 2020). Forty-six participants were recruited for this study. These participants will be recruited from the Oklahoma State University campus and surrounding area. Advertisements were posted in the college newspaper (*The O'Colly*), on common space bulletin boards, and through interpersonal communication. Prospective participants were asked to contact the researcher if they were interested in taking part in this research. Participants filled out a preliminary survey to gauge their media use, age, and gender. Granted the participants' information fits the research scope, they were asked to sign up for one of the focus group sessions (11 in total).

Each session included two to six participants, and were a mix of all genders. While there are advantages to homogenous focus group sessions, like the group being more comfortable with each other more quickly, to encompass a wider range of perspectives a more diverse group dynamic was necessary (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). While the researcher acknowledges some researchers exclusively use homogeneous groups for focus group sessions (Breen, 2006), this research used heterogeneous groups as to not discriminate against any participant on the basis of gender and to allow for a more diverse set of opinions to be introduced.

Questionnaire Protocol

Focus group questions were open ended to ensure a wide-range of responses and opinions were acquired (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). Questions about participants' general media were

asked in the preliminary survey as well as in the focus group sessions, to allow for a more encompassing picture of the participants' usage of streaming services and movie-going habits. Examples include "How often do you use streaming services" and "How often did you/do you watch movies in theaters?" These questions will ensure the participants are indeed "movie buffs" and will address these participants changes in media consumption due to the pandemic. Then, questions of substitutability ensued, such as "Is your satisfaction with watching a new film like *Wonder Woman: 1984* at home on HBOMax the same as it would be in theaters?" These questions and follow up questions allowed the researcher to understand these participants perceived substitutability between streaming and movie-going. The researcher asked questions to determine the participants' perception of the movie-going experience versus the streaming experience. Questions like "what are the biggest differences between seeing a film in theaters and streaming at home?" Follow up questions were asked to ensure the group discusses cost, social aspects, and experience. Then, questions regarding the pandemics' influence on these decisions to watch films such as "Do you avoid going to the movie theater because of the pandemic" helped the researcher establish COVID-19 as an avoidance motive for going to the theater, or on the flip side, a motivation for watching theatrical content on streaming platforms. Questions such as "do you plan on attending more movies in the theater after the threat of COVID-19 is minimized" helped the researcher gauge the likely longevity of streaming platforms as a preferred method of consuming big-budget films, or if this model was popular only because of the pandemic restrictions. The full set of questions asked by the moderator can be found in Appendix A.

Procedures

As this research was conducted while the pandemic was still occurring, the focus group sessions were conducted over the internet, via video call software (Zoom). A preliminary set of focus group sessions were conducted with audio recorded then transcribed and analyzed to allow predominant themes to emerge (Creswell, 1998). A second set of focus group sessions were conducted to determine if similar themes emerge (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996).

To ensure participants' identities and opinions remained confidential, each participant was given a four-digit code. The master list of each participants name and unique code were maintained by the researcher in a secure location. Names were changed when discussing participant's answers, although correct demographic information of the individual will be provided.

The researcher acted as the moderator due to a lack of funding. Before the start of each focus group, the moderator reminded the participants that their identities will not be revealed and the participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were debriefed on focus group etiquette and expectations. Then the moderator asked the list of questions, ensuring each participant had their chance to input their thoughts and opinions before moving to the next question (Creswell & Livingstone, 1996). The moderator asked participants to expand on vague answers, or ask for clarification when necessary. The moderator did not lead the participants or used biased language when guiding the session (Gunter, 2000).

Data Analysis

Each session was analyzed for overarching themes, reoccurring sentiments, and general consensus. While these insights guided the researchers understanding of audiences' preferences and habits regarding streaming and theatrical viewing of films, these themes cannot be applied to

the general public. Creswell (1998) suggested a data analysis spiral, a technique for data analysis where the researcher engages in a process of organizing, reflecting, describing, categorizing, and interpreting data. This process allowed the researchers to make sense of the data to create an account of the situation being investigated (Creswell, 1998). The first step of this process is data collection itself, which in turn must be organized and managed by the researcher (Creswell, 1998). Then, the researcher is tasked with reading and reflecting on this data through note taking (Creswell, 1998). The researcher is then able to classify, describe, and interpret the data by making comparisons, contextualizing, and categorizing (Creswell, 1998). This allows dominant themes to emerge, and for consensus and disagreements on specific topics to be identified (Creswell, 1998). Finally, the researcher can present the data in a comparison table or matrix, that describes the relationships between categories, or major themes (Creswell, 19980.

Lunt and Livingstone (1996) asserted the reliability necessary for focus group research stems from the level of interpretation, which should be open-ended in nature to compliment the nature of focus group research. Also, the thematic content which emerges during analysis and the consistency of these themes over many focus group sessions with different participants indicates reliability (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996).

Creswell and Miller (2000) identified three lenses for verification in qualitative research, the researcher, the participants, and those external to the study. While several paradigm positions exist and are used in qualitative research today, a systematic position will be taken in this research. Triangulation, or identifying themes or categories through multiple forms of evidence, in this case, through multiple focus group sessions, will be used to achieve verification in terms of the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checks, or the practice of taking the participants' statements back to them and ensuring these statements accurately represent the

beliefs and opinions held by the participant, also allows for verification through the participant's lens (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Finally, an audit trail, or relying on external auditors, or third party reviewers, to examine and review the findings of the study supports the validity of the research through an external lens. The credibility of the study will come from the researcher's use of the participant's own words as description supporting the themes identified by the research. The quality of detail in such writing will provide readers with assurances about the credibility of the researcher's analyses (Cresswell, 1998).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The goal of this study was to discover if viewing big-budget movies at home was an adequate substitute in the eyes of the participants, and if they preferred to watch these movies at home or at theaters. Data derived from the 11 focus groups contextualized the attitudes and perceptions of streaming movies at home and in movie theaters for 18-to-24-year-old movie buffs. The general consensus among participants was that they missed going to the movie theater, and had either already attended a film in theaters during the pandemic or planned to do so in the near future. Overwhelmingly, participants stated watching a movie at home was not a similar experience to watching in theaters, and most participants stated they preferred to watch movies in theaters, especially when the film was a highly anticipated, big-budget blockbuster. The responses from participants regarding the similarity and differences of these experiences as well as motivating features varied, but overarching themes did emerge. The most prominent themes that emerged from the focus group sessions were: (a) social movies (at the theaters and at home); (b) the theatrical experience (at the theater as well as attempts to recreate this experience at home); and c) holding out for blockbusters in the theaters. Participants who preferred streaming movies at home noted several specific themes including (a) privacy; (b) comfort; (c) accessibility; and (d) control as to why streaming at home is more preferable than going to the theater. Additionally, a section will be dedicated to analyzing how participants made choices regarding viewing films in a theatrical or home setting.

Of the participants, all but four remarked they subscribe to and use Netflix. Additionally, all but three participants reported subscribing to at least two streaming platforms. Eight participants didn't share their streaming frequency, but of the participants who did respond, each stated they stream at least once weekly, with 24 participants reporting they stream video every day.

Four participants did not respond to questions regarding movie theater attendance, but of the 42 remaining participants, all but seven described their movie theater attendance as frequent (once or twice every week) to infrequent (once or twice every few months). These findings reiterate almost all the participants are both frequent streamers of video entertainment content and theater-goers.

Out of the 11 focus group sessions, nine consisted of four to six participants, while the remaining two groups had three and two participants. These two groups were supposed to include more participants, but the majority of scheduled participants did not join these focus group sessions. These two smaller sessions were treated as in-depth interviews, with the same questions asked. These smaller sessions yielded most of the same themes as the larger groups, and participants of these groups added insightful comments on films that would prompt them to return to theaters and the aspects of theater-going missed during the pandemic.

Social Movies

While Palmgreen et al (1988) noted the social motivations of going to the movie theater, this was elaborated on with Tefertiller (2017) and Tefertiller et al. (2020). These studies addressed the social capital and FOMO elements of theatrical viewing, the social utility of a film is essentially referring to the individual's ability to talk about the film, whether it be with family and friends, or on social media. From the existing uses and gratifications based research into film

and television, the theme *social movies* encapsulates the perceived social utility a film may have, as well as the perception that watching a movie is a social event in and of itself.

The theme *social movies*, refers to the perspective that watching movies (especially big blockbusters) in theaters and at home is a social experience, typically shared with family and friends. Many of the participants claimed they view watching a movie as a social experience that differs from watching TV or streaming shows. This social aspect of movies was compounded by the event-like feel of going to a meal and a movie with a group, and many respondents noted they enjoyed discussing the film after the screening. Additionally, these movies associated with a group experience were reportedly more memorable than movies participants had viewed alone. This theme of social movies also refers to the fact nearly all participants stated they would never go to a movie theater alone, and those who had attended a movie in theaters alone noted they had only done so because they wanted to see the movie but had no one willing to go with them. When asked about their satisfaction regarding watching a movie at home as opposed to watching it in theaters, participants described not only the difference in screen size and other environmental factors contributing to both experiences, but the social interactions prompted by each of these experiences, as well as activities before and after both that contribute to the participants' overall satisfaction, or lack thereof. The constant in these sentiments was the idea watching a movie is a group activity. Whether watching at home with the family and store-bought snacks, or friends going to the movie theater after a meal, participants overwhelmingly described the act of watching a movie as a social experience.

Even when participants were not avid movie-goers, they reported they would go to a movie if a group of friends really wanted to go, and valued the social interactions of the outing higher than actually watching the film.

Social Movies at The Theater

Often, while describing going to a movie in theaters, participants would state going to the movies also meant going to eat at a restaurant with a group. For example, "Elle" said, "where I'm from, we typically go eat dinner and stuff before the movies and make a whole night of it." Many participants, like "Leia," described the movie theater as a reoccurring place to meet friends and saw the theater as primarily, a place for social gathering. "I've grown up like, having the movies as where my friends and I would hang out. I would honesty go all the time for the social part of it and just being with my friends and that was a hobby that we like do when we hung out."

In this case, the respondent views the movie as secondary to the larger group outing they are engaging in. "Marty" described this social "event" similarly to "Leia" and "Elle."

> "Marty": Usually I'd go as almost like a social event, you know? Like you go with your buddies or whoever you're with and you have a night out on the town or whatever, you go see a movie. That's kind of, like whenever I would go see movies that's more of a social gathering type deal, more so than anything.

Some participants spoke about the social nature of going to the movie theater in the past tense, and suggested the pandemic caused them to view watching movies at home as a normal event. This participant later reported going to a movie would not be their first choice of activity post-pandemic if they had the choice to stream the films at home.

> "Laura": Going to the movies used to be like either a fun thing me and my friends would do, we would get dressed up and like lunch or something beforehand, and like make a day of it. Or, maybe it was a date or something like that. And now it's just like, normal. I wouldn't consider going over to someone's house and watching something a date night.

However, other participants highlight the social interaction within a movie theater as a primary motivation for returning to their local movie theater once the pandemic has subsided.

"Harry": I just think the ability to take your family out in a social setting and just kind of be around other people other than your family is I don't want to say I don't like my family but to have that social interaction with other people getting to experience a movie together, I think that's something that once COVID gets minimized it's something that everyone is going to want.

Finally, the following participants' exchange highlights the core theme of social movies. They describe the allure of the theater not only as an ideal place to consume a film, but as a place to experience something with a group of people. The pleasure is found in other people also enjoying and reacting to the film.

"Han": I don't go to the movie theater alone, I'll at least have one other person, or preferably more than two or three people maybe. Even that, if I'm in a group where some people want to go and watch another movie and I don't really care for it, I don't have an interest for it but I didn't not want to see it, I wouldn't be against it. Because I mainly just want the experience of being in a large room with a huge screen and everybody kind of taking in the film at the same time, that's my favorite part about films, it's just the journey that it takes you on and it's always more fun when you have more people around that are all going through the same thing, especially with experiences like *Avengers: Endgame*, when that came out, I went to go see that opening day, that was literally one of the best experiences of my life.

"Indiana": Just kind of being with other people, you know, and when you're in a theater, and there's a funny scene, you along with a hundred other people, laugh. Like "Han" said

earlier about *Avengers: Endgame*, I remember watching it in a full theater, at the end, everyone just, it's kind of like when you're at a sports game, people cheer, that's exactly what it was, everyone was so in tune with the movie, it can't really be replicated.

This exchange addresses the feeling of community at the movie theater. Enjoying something with a group of people seems to enhance the filmic experience, and leads to greater satisfaction. The social interactions individuals have before, during, and after a film influence the perception and recollection of the film.

Social Movies at Home

The social aspect of watching a movie was also prominent when participants spoke about streaming movies at home. This behavior, watching movies on streaming platforms, is largely a social activity, more so than watching television shows on the same platforms. Wednesday mused, "I've noticed that I don't really watch movies by myself, I'll watch shows, just because there aren't a lot of people I'd watch every single episode with. So, if I'm with my family or friends I'll definitely watch a movie instead of a show." In another focus group, this sentiment was restated in some variation by two participants.

"Juno": It's like 50/50 for me, when I'm with my friends and family we might watch a movie or *The Bachelor*, or something. But, when I'm by myself I'll probably just watch like a TV show that I'm watching, and try to finish that season.

"Elle": For me, I typically watch movies with my friends and family, but whenever I'm by myself I'll watch a TV show for background noise while I'm doing homework or studying.

While the theme of social movies was more common, this idea that movies are more of a social experience than TV did occur enough to pique the researcher's interest. Further research on the

38

difference between streaming movies and television in terms of social experience should be considered. Most commonly, participants would share their habits of watching movies at home with friends or family. Some participants described their usage of streaming at home during the pandemic as a placeholder for going to the theaters, but enjoyed being able to chat during the film with friends, family, and roommates.

"Napoleon": I feel like when I'm with my friend in my house watching it, it's more like a social thing to me and I can watch the movie and talk to my friends at the same time, instead of us just sitting in silence watching the movie. Honestly, it's better for me because I'm a social person and it's kind of hard for me to sit still, too.

"Anton": Obviously if you're at home and watching a movie with your friends, you can talk about it more, but if you're in a public theater it's hard to communicate what you're thinking of the movie. I know that some people don't like when you talk during movies, but like making jokes with my friends about the movie that we're watching.

Essentially, these participants enjoyed streaming at home as they were able to enjoy the social aspects of watching a movie without the expectation of silence in the theater. So, the social aspect of watching a movie is not confined to the theater, in fact, some participants note the theater has a tendency to suppress socialization during the movie. Disruptive talking can result in removal from the theater, but in the comfort of one's own home, conversations about the film can flourish and jokes can be made.

The Theatrical Experience

Throughout each focus group session, participants described the unique experience a movie theater provides. The sentiment was that the appeal of going to a movie in theaters was about more than the film itself; the atmosphere and overall cinematic experience marked and

defined a trip to the theater. The large screen, sound quality, concessions, and ambiance of the theater itself all contributed to this feeling that, to many participants, could not be replicated. Additionally, some participants claimed they enjoyed viewing a movie in theaters more than they would at home, affirming Tefertiller et al (2020) finding that perceived satisfaction or gratifications of a viewing environment influenced an individual's intention to see a film in theaters.

Some participants reported they did not consider streaming a movie at home as a comparable experience to watching a film in theaters. "Katniss" stated that the satisfaction with watching a film at home was "not even close" to the satisfaction she would get from seeing it in movie theaters. When asked to elaborate, "Katniss" said:

> Just the movie-going experience, sitting in front of a humungous screen, hearing people's reactions, like in a couple movies they like gasp or something, if something intense happens on the screen. It's really nice to be able to get that feeling of "oh my gosh, this is so amazing" and everyone else is having the exact same experience as me. On a little screen, you are kind of, usually alone in a room, watching it on your phone or a TV. You don't get that experience that big "wow" just happened.

"Hal" chimed in and noted the in-person theatrical experience provided greater enjoyment:

> I feel so much better than staring at a laptop in your room and stuff. You know at the movies, you might be with your friends or family, in a dark theater with a huge screen going on and you know, your eyes are just glued to what's going on and definitely the audience reactions just make it better and whatnot.

The movie theater audiences' state of heightened stimulation is compounded by the impeding screen on the audience and the sound literally surrounding and bombarding the audience.

Additionally, the social aspect of watching a movie adds to the spectacle of the film, adding enjoyment when the film elicits audible reactions from the audience.

> "Forrest": Yeah, I just think that movies are really, just the entire atmosphere is what really makes the theater like a place to just go and watch a movie, because like, you can get your house dark, you house is comfortable, it's your house. But like, in a movie theater they have like, specifically like designed that place to like, whenever there is a lot of vibrations or noise, you feel it. Sometimes it really makes a movie better, I feel like.

When asked about the differences between seeing a movie in theaters and a home, "Han" recalled the features of movie theater the group had mentioned missing while streaming films at home during the pandemic.

> "Han": Like we said about the size of the screen, the sound, the atmosphere, you just can't replicate the movie theater, the snacks, the people around you, even the process of going up to the ticket booth or even if you already have your ticket, just walking in, figuring out what room your theater is in, all that stuff. It's just, it's not the same.

All of these features contribute to what other participants, including "Bruce," an avid movie goer, call a "premium experience." "You kind of pay for a premium experience, in my opinion, with like the massive screen, great audio. So, that's how I see it. You're paying a premium to see this movie in the best possible way."

"Bruce" also notes the expense of going to a see a movie in theaters, but explains this cost is warranted due to the "premium" features the theater provides. This statement reiterates the idea that a movie theater is the preferred method for consuming films. "Clementine," another avid movie-goer, claimed she is more likely to enjoy a movie more if she watches it in theaters.

"Clementine": Going to the movie theaters is definitely more of an experience and the volume level and the big screen definitely, I think, have an impact on how much I enjoy the movie, because like, most of the time I never leave the movie theater saying "oh, I didn't like that movie" but if I watched it at home I would think it wasn't that good or critiquing it. So, watching at home, watching it on a streaming service, is like, different than watching it in movie theaters, I'm more likely to enjoy it if it's in theaters.

Movie theater popcorn was another hot topic for the focus groups, and participants noted that popcorn and other staple movie theater snacks, no matter how expensive, were an integral part of the movie theater experience.

"Harry": You can't simulate movie theater popcorn. And I'm big on the popcorn and the overall homey feeling of the movie theater, and the seats, and just having that experience of being surrounded by the big speakers and the big screen for me. It's just not something that you can simulate or replicate at home.

Additionally, social expectations and theater rules contributed to the experience. Participants claimed not being able to use their phones or have conversations in a movie theater helps them focus on the film. The lack of distractions in theaters was a prominent advantage over streaming at home according to some focus group participants.

"Natasha": I was going to say, when we were watching movies at home during the pandemic I'd catch myself looking at my phone and stuff and not really paying attention to the movie, which is something I would never do if I were actually in a movie theater.

"Margot": I personally enjoy watching them in a theater more. Just because I know I give the theater my full attention, which sounds weird but when I'm home, like I get distracted by so many things. I'm more likely to be on my phone at home, versus in a theater, I

know it's rude to other people so I don't even think about it, so it kind of did take away

some of the satisfaction.

But conversely, others breaking these rules negatively affected participants' view of the theater experience. Also, an unsatisfactory theater contributed negatively to participants desire to see a movie in theaters.

"Neo": I'm not one of those people who is going to react to everything and be obnoxious like some people, but even when people are talking during the movies, it's just seen as really rude, in the theater because everyone is just there to watch it, not to discuss it. Sometimes, that will just be happening and like a lot different because like you can just talk to whoever you want to when you're just at your own place or whatever, you can just have those discussions. But it's rude and you'll get judged for doing that at an actual movie theater because everyone's like "well, I paid to come and see this so I don't want to listen to your conversation about it."

"Marty": The last movie theater I would really go to in high school, before college was a, when I used to live in Enid, the screen wasn't that good, the chairs and floor were always sticky and you could see where people would peel away at all the chairs, very, very gross, so I think it definitely does play a factor, because I'm getting a kind of run down experience for like, at least $10, if I don't want to buy any food or anything.

When asked if access to a theater with nicer accommodations would have an effect on his desire to go to the theater, "Marty" said:

I've been going to Illinois for the past couple summers now. And, uh, the movie theater over there is like, so nice. It's leather seats that recline, and there are a bunch of nice cup holders and it's got like, it's kind of, it's got some kind of machinery that can make it

move and you can press buttons and stuff and it'll like, accommodate to your request, I

guess. Very fancy and I would definitely consider it more if like a movie theater looked

more like that, than back where I used to live. Especially if I'm paying around the same

price, too.

Affirming "Marty's" stance, those with access to a premium theater, or a theater with reclining

seats and dine-in food service were more frequent movie goers, and were more excited to go

back to theaters post pandemic than those without access to premium theaters.

"Ferris": You sit in a nice, super comfy chair. You can go to one of those places, I don't

know if you've heard of movie studio grill, it actually serves you food in your seat. You

pay a pretty price for it, but you know, it's sometimes cool to go do that and you're

basically just getting food and a big ole movie screen and sound system.

The theatrical experience is more than a list of features indicative to watching a movie in a

movie theater, the experience involves all five senses and impacts not only the enjoyment of a

film, but the memories one makes in association with a film. The screen size, audio quality, room

darkness, concessions, lack of distractions, and quality of movie theater also contribute to the

experience, and work together to create an ideal viewing experience.

Replicating the Theatrical Experience at Home

While some participants described their experience of streaming movies at home during

the pandemic as a replacement for going to the theater, there are different approaches and

degrees to replicating the experience. Some participants described darkening the room the movie

would be watched in, getting movie theater snacks like popcorn and candy,

"Buffy": I've grown to kind of like just planning when to watch a movie with my

roommates or planning to watch a really exciting one, and like we're going to have this

for dinner, we're going to like, buy snacks and like pretend like we're having a movie

night.

The rules and expectations of decorum at the theater are highly often viewed as preserving the

experience of watching a film without distractions. When watching at home, some respondents,

like "Buffy", attempted to replicate the lack of distractions the theater demand. "If I'm watching

it with my friends, everyone is going to be quiet, attention is going to be on the movie, like we're

simulating a movie experience as much as possible." Some participants had access to a home

theater, and were able to adequately replicate the theatrical experience, so much so, they didn't

feel like they had missed out on the theatrical experience during the pandemic.

> "Ferris": One of my best friends has a new movie room, with like four rows of big movie
>
> chairs and a big ole screen, so that was my version of going to the movies. It was like,
>
> let's go over to his house and watch a movie, it was the equivalent of that for us.
>
> "Leia": At my house we have like, a media room, and the sound is really good and so it's
>
> like, during quarantine, having that room just felt like I was at the movies.

While streaming and theater going where overwhelming not seen as substitutes for each other,

these attempts to recreate the theatrical experience at home during the pandemic showcase why

some participants saw less distinction between the two. Participants who were able to simulate

the movie theater experience at home during the pandemic were more satisfied with the films

they watched on streaming platforms compared to participants who were mainly watching these

films on their laptops or small televisions.

Holding Out for Blockbusters

While many participants expressed their desire to go back to theaters, many felt the films

released during the pandemic were not intriguing, and stated they were waiting for either specific

films or a certain type of film. Most of these films were described as blockbusters, action movies, superhero movies (primarily Marvel films), and comedies. Some participants had certain movies they were holding out for, films the pandemic had delayed, like *Black Widow* and *A Quiet Place 2*. Tefertiller found audiences chose to see "exciting, visually enticing films" in theaters (Tefertiller, 2017, p. 27). In this research, visually enticing films like Marvel, DC, and other action films were given as examples of films that would prompt participants to return to the movie theaters.

When asked to describe a movie that would prompt them to go to the theater, participants cited multiple factors, such as specific genres or certain films, or even noted the marketing saturation of the films, like trailers and commercials

"Ripley": *Black Widow*! Just like a big, exciting blockbuster.

"Anton": I think that once the threat is minimized, I'll probably head back to the movies again. It's just waiting for those movies that were postponed to come back and see those in theaters, like *A Quiet Place 2,* and stuff like that.

"Norman": I definitely plan on going to the movies in the summer, there are some movies I definitely want to see, like the *Fast and the Furious* movie that's coming out and the *Black Widow* movie. I'm like a huge fan of the *Fast and the Furious* franchise, so just being able to have the option to go back to the theater, and getting to be part of the atmosphere again, of the movie and being able to watch a movie that I'm really looking forward to, it's like, that would be a great experience.

Some participants described the perceived or anticipated popularity of a film as a reason to go see it. This assessment of a film's potential popularity reflects the research conducted by Tefertiller et al (2020), which investigated how perceived social utility motivated audiences to

watch certain programs. Additionally, participants noted their friends' desire to see a new film was a motivation for them to also want to see it.

> "Marty": I would say once they start putting bangers on the big screen, and all my friends were like "hey let's go," that's what would prompt me to go. I can't like, think of any movies that are coming out that I'm super excited for so, I think, I guess when stuff that I'm more interested in comes out, I'll be more apt to go to the movie theater.

Marvel movies were routinely brought up by participants like "Donnie" when describing a film that would prompt them to return to theaters. "It would have to be a really good movie. It would have to be like something huge coming up, like *Endgame* or something like that." For some, Marvel movies, and other "big movies" were worth going to in theaters, but "smaller movies" were something to be screened at home on a streaming platform.

> "Napoleon": But for those big movies like Endgame and everything, like Avengers I'd like want to go see it in like an actually [sic] movie theater, but for smaller movies that aren't as big, I'll probably see them in my house. But if there was a big new release like Star Wars, I'd go see that too.

To summarize, holding out for blockbusters was a reoccurring theme in this research. Focus group participants were more eager to see films that were part of successful franchises, and their intention to go to a movie theater was greatly influenced by the perceived popularity of the film they wanted to see. While the theatrical experience itself was enough for some participants to return to the theaters, for others, a specific type of movie was necessary to draw them back to the theaters.

Arguments for Streaming at Home

While the majority of participants exclaimed their excitement for returning to the theater, some preferred staying at home to stream movies. Also, some participant who noted their excitement for watching a film in theaters, like "Napoleon" from the previous section, claimed there were some movies they'd prefer to stream at home. Some advantages noted for streaming movies at home are accessibility, privacy, convenience, and control.

Accessibility

When discussing the advantages of streaming at home, many participants noted the accessibility features of streaming that appeal to them. Accessibility refers to features streaming offers like closed captions, which are not typically available in movie theaters. Also, participants like "Norman" noted streaming is a more accessible option for those with mobility issues or compromised immune systems, as well as the general population. "I think it's good that they're more accessible and it's easier for people to watch, like maybe they wouldn't be able to go to the movie theater normally." Visual aids like subtitles and closed captions are essential for deaf audiences, and can be helpful for others. Streaming gives the viewer the option to use this feature.

"Kirk": I just thought about this, being around some of my family members or even some of my buddies, like they're like "oh let's put on the subtitles" and that's kind of a bigger thing that just goes over people's heads. You know, whenever you watch a new movie and just having to read these subtitles the whole time. Whenever you're in the theater they probably won't have subtitles the whole time, but if you miss something you have to figure it out for yourself and hopefully you can like figure it out by the end of the movie.

Privacy

  Privacy was another feature some participants valued of streaming. "Donnie" is an avid video streamer who reported they go to the movie theater approximately once a month.

    "Donnie": I think I'd like to chill out in my house in privacy sometimes, and yeah, I

    guess it's not like a big thing for me, I mean the visual aspect is cool, that's my favorite

    part about the movie theater. And the sound quality, but other than that, I'd just like

    private you know.

"Donnie" also notes the expense of the theater keeps them at home, especially if they have the option to stream the film using one of their five streaming subscriptions. "Buffy" rarely streamed movies or television before the pandemic, but went to the movie theater around twice per month prior to the pandemic. Her streaming drastically increased due to the pandemic, and even stated she had never rented a movie on a streaming platform before the pandemic, but rented five to ten during the pandemic and would continue to.

    "Buffy": I think that I will always, now watch some of those big-ticket movies on

    streaming services rather than going to the movies because of the level of comfort and

    adaptability and privacy that you have, it also has a certain amount of weight on your

    decision to now.

Control

  Control over the film, simply put, the ability to pause and rewind the movie, was one of the most cited advantages of streaming at home by "Margot" and others. "I think the only pro for watching and streaming at your house is you're able to press pause or rewind and you're able to control it more." Control can also mean control over ones' environment. One focus group participant dubbed "Luke" describes possible disturbances one might encounter in the movie

theater, and explains that at home, one can reduce the possibility of disturbances. Exacting control over the people you watch a film with based on their decorum is not possible in the movie theater, but can be achieved at home.

> "Luke": I think the one thing that home offers better than going to the movie theaters is you might not know, since there are a lot of people in the movie theater and you might get someone who is rude or is loud during the movie. It's disrespectful, and I think that home environment is, you know what's going on. So, if something is happening you can pause   or if you're around your family they know they're all watching it so everyone is respectful and just trying to watch it. But I think the movie theater simulation of someone might be rude or on their phone, talking a lot, or if there's an altercation, it can take away from the benefits of wanting to go to the movie theater.

Some participants, such as "Ferris," noted the ability to control the movie on a streaming platform allowed them to take breaks from the film, which improved their viewing experience. "I can't sit still, so sometimes streaming services are a little bit better because sometimes I have to get up and move around and do something different, then I can come back to it later." Some participants, like "Wanda," mused that their generation necessitates more control over their media, as they have become accustom to instant gratification.

> I don't know, maybe this is just me but I think that our generation, we're so used to instant gratification now, and information overloads, we've kind of lost our want to go to the movie theater as much because we can just go sit at home and watch whatever we want and we can stop whenever we want to.

Streaming allows for more control over ones' environment, as well as control over the program. Being able to pause, rewind, turn on subtitles, and even switch programming are all features of streaming valued over a theatrical experience by some.

Cost

While many participants shared their thoughts about the cost of going to the theater compared to streaming subscriptions and rentals, the subjectivity and variance between theaters and streaming platforms resulted in a wide range of responses. Many participants agreed the cost of movie theater tickets and concessions was expensive, but conversely, many participants disagreed, citing low ticket nights and sneaking in snacks as a way to mitigate much of the expense.

"Carrie": I definitely think movie theaters in general make the entire thing expensive overall. I love going to the movie theater but there's always that thing in the back of my head that's like "I wish buying popcorn or candy or an Icee or whatever wasn't so expensive." That's like the only downside of going to the movie theater I think. Because I think over the years it's definitely gotten more expensive, with the tickets and all the stuff to go with it. I think now, everyone has done it, put like candy in their jacket pocket to sneak in, so you don't have to pay for it.

Additionally, the variance between participants and their respective subscriptions made a consensus nearly impossible. However, many noted high rental prices from streaming services like Disney+ could be justified with a group all pitching in to help cover the $29.99 cost of premium content rentals.

"Han": With cost it's like, you'd think movie theaters would be way more expensive, because that's just the nature of movie theaters, the tickets cost $12 and the popcorn costs

51

15. But like, HBO is kind of different because like they're releasing their movies for free but HBO is already a more expensive service, it's $15 a month. So, it's not quite there, but Disney+ is doing the, you're paying for the movie, for *Black Widow* you're charged $30, with *Mulan*, you're charge $30, so at that point, you're paying about the same money for the movie that you could have seen in theaters with food. So as far as costs go, I think it's not going to be that different, and I think if these streaming services plan to go this route for the future, they will probably start implementing more fees to try and match it, but that would probably be the biggest difference for like, connection for like when it comes to cost.

Additionally, participants thought streaming platforms' rental windows were too short, and felt they should be able to access the new film indefinitely after paying $30.

"Harry": You shouldn't have to pay full price for a movie and you're only able to keep it for 24 hours because then I feel like you are getting robbed of the overall movie experience if you will.

"Margot": I think it depends because sometimes when you stream a movie you pay kind of a pricey amount and then it can only stay for like 24 hours or 48 hours. And I think that's kind of like a movie theater, but you're not getting the full movie theater experience, which is why I think you're getting robbed of that. But, if you're buying a movie and you're able to stream it as much as you want, I think that its better.

Some participants claimed they would never pay extra to rent a new release film on a streaming platform. These participants know the film will eventually be offered with their subscription, so they wait to watch it until then.

"Viola": Yeah, Disney plus usually charges like $30 whenever they release those new movies, but if you wait for however much time they'll be free with your subscription. I've never paid the additional money to watch anything on any of my subscription services, because I don't think it's worth it if all I have to do is wait for it to be free.

"Luke": Yeah, I think with streaming services right now, like Disney+, they tried to release *Mulan* where you could watch it early for like $15 dollars extra, like on top of what you're already paying. In my mind that didn't really make sense as a price range because I would just wait for it whenever it would become free. But, what I think streaming services have, what they're trying to do, like what HBO was trying to do was offer it for free to people who are already paying the subscription as to what kind of make it seem like an incentive for people who pay for that streaming service so they can have both the old content and newer content that's coming out.

Although many participants claimed going to the movie theater was expensive, some participants claimed they were more than willing to pay to see a movie in theaters after being denied that experience during the pandemic.

"Han": I will say, right now I would gladly pay too much money to go to a movie theater, just because I miss the experience. Now, if none of this had happened I would still complain about the price because that's what I did before all of this happened, I still went, but I would complain about the prices, but now that it's become kind of a niche thing, I feel like I would be willing to pay more money, I mean not like, I guess the same amount of money I was before, but I would be willing to pay that higher price just for the experience alone, because it's something that I didn't realize before.

While focus group participants offered many conflicting opinions regarding the perceived worth of streaming versus the cost of going to a movie theater, these differing perspectives address the still tumultuous media landscape brought on by the pandemic. The industry has been adopting new standards and price points as a result of the pandemic, and this process is still very much underway.

The Choice

Many participants responded that they value the option of streaming at home or going to the theater when it comes to new releases. Some noted they liked going to theaters when the film was a largely anticipated sequel, or a big, blockbuster film, and preferred to stream smaller, indie films at home.

> "Neo": For a movie like Star Wars or Endgame or Infinity War, I would prefer to watch it in theaters, because they are just huge movies and they were only released every couple years and it's a series. But any sort of regular type movie, I would just prefer to watch it at my house instead, because I like a private setting a little more in general. But, if I'm going to watch a big movie for the experience, I want to do it in a theater.

For some participants, like "Han," movie theaters are less convenient than streaming at home, even if the preferred viewing method is watching at a movie theater.

> I do like the implementation that these streaming services did, especially, mainly HBO Max, they're the first ones who really went with it, where it just really serves as an alternative for it, where if you aren't really comfortable doing that, you can watch it. And I really respect that, it's just kind of fair enough to have both options. But I will say in my opinion, the movie theater is my preferred method, it's just less convenient.

When faced with a choice between streaming a new movie at home or going to a movie theater, many factors influence the decision. For many participants, the thrill of the theatrical experience is enough to prompt them to return to the theaters, for others, only a blockbuster film will encourage them to take a trip to the movie theater. When it comes to streaming, it's clear many participants became more avid video streamers during the pandemic, and this conditioning made them more likely to choose to stream movies rather than see them in theaters in the future.

"Kirk" shared their opinions on the strategies theaters and movie studios have implemented during the pandemic, and what the implications might be.

> I think we're going to see a giant shift in obviously releasing these movies and how much money they're going to be making and stuff like that. I think without a serious change, with like streaming services releasing these new movies, these movie theaters are going to become extinct, or they're not going to be as popular as before if we keep coming up with all this innovative technology to allow us to watch a movie in the comfort of your own home or where ever, traveling. It's easier and more accessible and I don't know if people will want to revert back to the old ways of waiting for a movie.

According to "Kirk", HBO Max may have opened a can of worms they can't close by allowing audience the choice to stream new releases or watch them in theaters. "Napoleon" shares "Kirk's" sentiments, and also predicts the downfall of movie theaters.

> "Napoleon": I do think the movie theater is dying, like streaming has just become so big, and because of the pandemic so many people are seeing "oh, I don't have to leave my house to be able to watch a movie, I can stay on my own couch and eat my own food and just say here."

While many participants value having the option to choose between going to the movie theater and streaming at home, it seems that many are ready to return to theaters. While this transitional era has made streaming more pervasive and popular, a return to normal is also highly desired by many. Industry professionals and focus group participants alike predicted the downfall of movie theaters, but after the resounding excitement for a return to movie theaters from these focus group participants, the end might not be so near. As more big-budget films hit the movie theaters after a year or more of being held back, streaming options may dwindle.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The research questions posed sought to understand the appeal of movie-going and streaming habits of people age 18-24, and reveal how the viewing environment and content is valued by these individuals. Based on the responses, streaming and watching a movie in theaters are decidedly not substitutes for one another, and big-budget, blockbuster films are enjoyed more in theaters than at home. Additionally, social aspects of watching a movie were still extremely important to participants, and participants viewed watching movies at the theater and on streaming platforms at home as a social activity that was predominantly done with a group of people. Lastly, the films participants reported wanting to see in theaters were mainly big-budget action, comedy, and horror films, typically part of a previously successful franchise.

Gratifications of Streaming and Theater-Going

Uses and gratifications theory was used as an analytical lens to view these research findings. While not every previously detected motivation for movie-going and television viewing was made evident in this research, all the overarching themes established in the focus groups could be tied to gratifications from previous research. To reiterate, recognized motivations for movie-going include (a) learning and information; (b) escape; (c) enjoyment; (d) pass time; (e) relieving loneliness; (f) behavioral resources; and (g) learning about self (Austin, 1986, p. 121). For television viewing, motivations include (a) program content, (b) entertainment, (c)

relaxation, (d) pass time/habits, (e) informational, (f) escape, (g) arousal, (h) companionship, and (i) social interaction (Rubin, 1981). Of these motivations, the most prominent motivation to emerge from this research is social interaction and companionship, as well as entertainment, enjoyment, and pass time. These motivations have been updated in recent years, and now emphasize social utility and social capital derived from programming (Tefertiller et al, 2020). Additionally, avoidance motivations noted in research conducted by Palmgreen et al., (1988) such as physical environmental restraints (being close to strangers) and social environmental constraints (noisy audiences) address some of the participants' motivations for streaming at home.

This previous research into the social aspects of movie-going and the social capital provided by participating in media mega-events also directly relates to the social movies theme.

Holding out for blockbusters was a reoccurring theme throughout the focus groups, and reflects Tefertiller's (2017) research into satisfaction with different viewing environments, like theaters and at home. Tefertiller's (2017) research also found audiences were more likely to choose a visually stimulating film, such as an action film, to view in theaters. These visually exciting films immerse the audience in the action, which increases perceived satisfaction and heightens the senses.

While studying college aged participants, Palmgreen et al. (1988) noted sensory discomfort, distractions, and being close to strangers as common avoidance factors of going to the movies. These avoidance factors were evident in this researcher, and participants noted privacy, control (over one's environment as well as the film), and accessibility as factors motivating streaming a film rather than taking a trip to the theater. (see Table 1 for discussion of gratifications emerging from the present study).

Table 1.

Gratifications identified for in-person theater attendance versus at home streaming experience

Gratifications of Theater Attendance	Shared Gratifications	Gratifications of Streaming
Environment	Social Interaction	Privacy
Visual and Audio Immersion		Control
Lack of Distractions		Accessibility
Concessions		Convenience

Other Findings

Beyond the identification of gratifications emerging from this study, the research yielded three other findings. Cha and Chan-Olmsted (2012) as well as Tefertiller's (2018) research assumed audiences have a finite amount of time to spend consuming media, so when new channels for consuming media emerge, audiences will replace the old channels in favor of the new channel. This leads to the first and perhaps most interesting finding. Cha and Chan-Olmsted (2012) and Tefertiller's (2018) idea that media is substitutable was not supported by this research, which found that while streaming consumption did increase and theatrical viewing decreased during the pandemic, the participants did not perceive these two avenues of viewing films as substitutes for each other. While participants did stream more content during the pandemic, especially during periods of lockdowns, the majority of participants were eager to return to the movie theater in the near future.

The second finding of the research was that the social aspects of watching a movie were still prominently valued, whether via a streaming platform at home or in the movie theater. Participants stated they preferred to watch movies with a group, and most claimed they would

never consider seeing a movie by themselves in theaters. Additionally, participants claimed an active, engaged audience added to the experience of watching a film. These affirmations that watching a movie is a social experience is directly supporting previous research into movie theater-going motivations, and gratifications sought from television "mega-events" (Palmgreen et al., 1988; Tefertiller et al., 2017). A particularly interesting facet of this research is that participants reported their streaming habits differed according to programming, and viewed watching movies (and to a lesser degree, television "mega events," like *The Bachelor*) differently than watching television programming. Watching movies was largely seen as a group activity, with some exceptions. So, audiences have been trained by the movie theater to perceive watching a movie as a group activity, which has translated to streaming. With the rise of streaming, lack of films going to theaters, and periods of theater shutdowns, audiences had no choice but to attempt to recreate the social experience of the movie theater at home via streaming platforms.

The social aspect of going to the movie theater wasn't the only feature participants claimed they missed during the pandemic. The theatrical experience, or the ideal environment for watching a movie fostered by the theater, was fondly recalled by participants, who longed to relive the experience. Movie theater popcorn, no matter how expensive, was a critical part of this experience, along with a dark room, plush seats, large screen, quality audio, and a respectful yet engaged audience to share the experience. Some participants tried to recreate this theatrical experience at home, but found the ambiance of the movie theater could not be replicated. Tefertiller (2017) noted the immersive nature of movie theaters cause heightened gratifications, which was supported in this researcher by participants noting their enjoyment of a film can be increased by watching it in theaters.

Interestingly, while fear of contracting COVID was assumed to have a strong influence on audiences' intention to go to the movie theaters, many participants claimed COVID had little bearing on their decision. According to some participants, COVID regulations at the movie theaters were annoying and deterred them from attending, but some participants noted they had no idea if their local theaters were even open. Participants who had been attending movies in the theater throughout the pandemic described the steps they had taken to ensure their safety, such as social distancing, wearing masks, and renting out theaters for private showings. While fear of contracting the virus was not concerning to most participants, some claimed they avoided going to the theater to reduce the risk of spreading COVID to their friends and family. The most prominently discussed deterrent to attending a movie in theaters was the lack of preferred content on the big screen. Participants were waiting for big, blockbuster films that were typically part of previously successful franchises.

Although movie theaters had been open long before the focus group sessions, many participants claimed they weren't aware of the theaters reopening or hadn't seen any movies they were interested being promoted. While the pandemic did shut down film production, many films that were finished were held back in order to maximize potential profits. Many of these films were noted by participants as potentially motivating them to return to theaters. Films like *Black Widow*, *A Quiet Place 2,* and *Fast and Furious 9* were all mentioned by participants who were looking forward to their releases. These films are all big-budget action or suspense films, which aligns with Tefertiller's (2017) research that found audiences were more likely to view visually exciting, spectacle films in theaters rather than at home. Thus, the third finding of this study, supported by Tefertiller's (2017) previous research, provides a better understanding of film genres audiences are willing to go to a movie theater for, and what types of films they prefer to

stream at home. Films that would prompt a trip to the theater were described by participants as mainly action, horror, and comedy. Additionally, large budget, highly marketed films part of existing franchises were more highly sought out at the theater. The participants' perceived worth of a film was comprised of how popular the film could be, as well as the potential enjoyment they could receive from the film. Some participants even noted they would feel disappointed if they paid to see a film in theaters that turned out to not be a box office success. This supports Tefertiller et al. (2020) idea that the social capital a film can provide an audience member can predict viewing intention in theaters. Participants frequently noted they would prefer to stream "smaller" movies at home, referring to low-budget films, independent films, and non-action films with low star power.

The implications of these research findings are far reaching. For the academic community, this study offers a cutting edge look at the increasingly popularity of streaming and its move to the mainstream during the pandemic. Additionally, this research proves young movie buffs are excited to return to the movie theater, and despite the tumultuous year the movie theater industry had, the saturation of streaming will not spell an end to the movie theater. Based on this research, fewer movies will come to theaters, and those that do get theatrical releases will be big-budget, franchise films in the action, comedy, or horror genres. Streaming platforms will become a place for smaller dramas, and independent films, perhaps produced exclusively for the streaming platform. As the summer of 2021 will bring a slew of highly anticipated blockbusters to theaters for the first time since March of 2020, this research predicts high box office totals and large audience turn outs for these films, *Black Widow, A Quiet Place 2, Fast & Furious 9*, and other big-budget, franchise films set to be released.

Limitations

While this research is a starting point to uncovering audience perceptions of streaming and movie theater-going, there are some limitations to this research. Firstly, this research was constricted by time, and regretfully, more time could not be allotted to focus group sessions and tracking the changes in the market during the pandemic. Also, by only focusing on avid streamers and movie theater-goers ages 18-to-24-years-old, this research is not applicable to the general population. In future research, all age groups should be considered, as well as audiences who aren't avid streamers and movie theater goers. Additionally, more demographic information should be collected to track differences between groups.

Future Research

Future research should also examine the concept of social movies in more depth, especially comparing the social aspects of differing medium. Attention paid to the social utility of going to the movie theater and event television should be directed to streaming movies as well, because this research shows audiences think about and consume movies and television differently. While this research discovered some people view movies differently than television, the conversation about the social capital of certain media is still in its early stages. As streaming becomes more common place, will the social perception of movies change? Are Netflix specials and super popular television series a social event in the same way movies are? Additionally, attention needs to be paid to new virtual reality content and its effects on streaming and the movie theater experience. Furthermore, knowledge on these issues would expand from quantitatively examining the themes that emerged from this focus group research.

REFERENCES

Alexander, J. (2020, October 28). Streaming was part of the future – now it's the only future, *The Verge*. https://www.theverge.com/21536842/streaming-disney-hbo-max-peacock-cbs-all-access-warnermedia-viacom-nbcuniversal

Allen, A. & Gomery, D. (1985). *Film history: Theory and practice.* McGraw-Hill.

Aron, A., & Langley, D. (2020). *Universal and AMC Announce Agreement for Exhibition of Films*. Comcast Corporate. https://corporate.comcast.com/press/releases/universal-filmed-entertainment-amc-entertainment-holdings-exhibition-of-universal-films

Austin, B. (1986). Motivations for movie attendance, *Communications Quarterly*, *34*(2), 115-126. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01463378609369627

Barnes, B. (2020, December 4). Warner Bros. says all 2021 films will be streamed right away. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/12/03/business/us-economy-coronavirus#warner-bros-will-release-all-of-its-2021-movies-on-streaming-and-in-theaters-at-the-same-time

Bean, T. (2021, January 9). This new streaming report shows that HBO Max is gaining on Netflix, Amazon and Hulu. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/travisbean/2021/01/09/this-new-streaming-report-shows-that-hbo-max-is-gaining-on-netflix-amazon-and-hulu/?sh=46d6f6fa7d86

Bondad-Brown, B., Rice, R., & Pearce, K. (2012). Influences on TV viewing and online user-shared video use: Demographics, generations, contextual age, media use, motivations, and audience activity. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 56*(4), 471-493. DOI: 10.1080/08838151.2012.73139

Breen. R. (2006). A practical guide to focus-group research. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *30(3)*, 463-475, DOI: 10.1080/03098260600927575

Cha, J. & Chan-Olmsted, S. (2012) Substitutability between online video platforms and Television. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 89*(2), 261-278. DOI: 10:10.1177/1077699012439035

Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions.* Sage Publications.

Cresswell, J. & Miller, D. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice, 39*(3), 124-130. DOI https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2

Edelman, K., Hurley, B., & Gangopadhyay, N. (2020). Digital media trends survey 14th edition. *Deloitte Center for Technology, Media, & Telecommunications. https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/digital-media-trends-consumption-habits-survey/summary.html*

Escandon, R. (2020, March 12). The film industry made a record-breaking $100 billion last year. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/rosaescandon/2020/03/12/the-film-industry-made-a-record-breaking-100-billion-last-year/?sh=25e06ca234cd

Gardner, E. (2020, August, 7). Judge agrees to end Paramount Consent decrees. *The Hollywood Reporter.* https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/judge-agrees-end-paramount-consent-decrees-1306387

Gaustad, T. (2019). How streaming services make cinema more important: Lessons from Norway. *Nordic Journal of Media Studies, 1*, 67-84. DOI: 10.2478/njms-2019-0005.

Gomery, D. (1991). *Movie history: A survey*. Wadsworth.

Gomery, D. (2000). Hollywood as Industry. In J. Hill & P. Gibson, (Eds.). *American cinema and Hollywood: Critical approaches* (pp. 19-28). Oxford University Press.

Gunter, B. (2000). *Media research methods*. Sage.

Hansen, A., Cottle, S., Negrine, R., Newbold, C. (1998). *Mass communication research methods*. New York University Press.

Hanssen, A. (2000). The block booking of films reexamined." *The Journal of Law & Economics, 43*(2), 395-426 https://doi.org/10.1086/467460

Hayden, E. (2020, January 17) Domestic box office attendance falls 4.6 percent in 2019. *The Hollywood Reporter*. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/domestic-box-office-attendance-falls-46-percent-2019-1270900#:~:text=Total%20theater%20attendance%20fell%204.6,from%201.301%20billion%20last%20year.

Herzog, H. (1941) On borrowed experience: An analysis of listening to daytime sketches." *Journal of Social Research*, *9*(1), 65-95. https://doi.10.5840/zfs1941915

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2019) *The cultural industries*. Sage.

Katz, E., Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1973) Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 37*(4), 509-523. https://doi.org/10.1086/268109

Krugman, D., Shamp, S., & Johnson, K. (1991). Video movies at home: Are they viewed like film or like television? *Journalism Quarterly, 68*(1-2), 120-130, https://doi.org/10.1177/107769909106800113

Lee, C., Nagpal, P., Ruane, S. & Sook Lim, H. (2018) Factors affecting online streaming subscriptions. *Communications of the IIMA, 6*(1) Article 2.

Lewis, J. (2008). *American film: A history*. W.W Norton & Company.

Lotz, A. (2017). *Portals: A Treatise on internet distributed television*. Michigan Publishing.

Lotz, A. (2018). *We now disrupt this broadcast: How cable transformed television and the internet revolutionized it all.* MIT Press.

Lowery, S. & DeFleur, M. (1995). *Milestones in mass communications research: Media effects,* (3rd ed.). Longman.

Lüders, M., Sundet, V., & Colbjørnsen. (2021). Towards streaming as a dominant mode of media use? A user typology approach to music and television streaming. *Nordicom Review*, *42*(1), 35-57. https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2021-0011

Lunt, P., & Livingstone, S. (1996). Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research. *Journal of Communication, 46*(2), 79-98. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1996.tb01475.x

McClintock, P. (2020, December 14). 2020 Box Office: Domestic revenue falls to 40-year low. *The Hollywood Reporter*. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/2020-box-office-domestic-revenue-falls-to-40-year-plus-low

McNary, D. (2020, August 31). Producers guild issues COVID-19 rules as industry restarts production. *Variety*. https://variety.com/2020/film/news/producers-guild-covid-19-rules-production-1234754062/

Mendelson, S. (2020, October 4). 'Tenet' and 'Hocus Pocus' top embarrassingly small U.S. box office. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2020/10/04/tenet-and-hocus-pocus-top-embarassingly-small-us-box-office/?sh=32d41952230c

Nielsen. (2020). Going swimmingly: Streaming continues to grow among consumers. *Nielsen Global Media*, https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2020/streaming-video-aug-2020-milestone/

Palmgreen, P., Cook, P., Harvill, J., & Helm, D. (1988). The motivational framework of moviegoing: Uses and avoidances of theatrical films. *Current Research in Film*, *4*, 1-23.

Paul, W. (2016). *When movies were theatre: Architecture, exhibition, and the evolution of American film*. Columbia University Press.

Ramachandran, N. (2020, December 10). Global cinema industry set to lose $32 billion in 2020, says Omdia report. *Variety*. https://variety.com/2020/film/news/global-cinema-industry-lose-32-billion-2020-omdia-report-1234850235/

Rubin, A. (1981, April). An examination of television viewing motivations. *Communications Research, 8*(2), 141-165. DOI: 10.1177/009365028100800201

Rubin, R. (2020, August 28). As 'Tenet' and 'New Mutants' open, audiences weigh risk of going back to the movies. *Variety*. https://variety.com/2020/film/box-office/tenet-new-mutants-moviegoers-returning-theaters-1234751077/

Rubin, R. (2021, January 12). U.S. box office plummets 80%, global revenue drops 71% in 2020 amid pandemic. *Variety.* https://variety.com/2021/film/box-office/box-office-final-revenues-2020-coronavirus-pandemic-1234879082/

Ruggiero, T. (2000). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass Communication & Society*, *3*(1), 3-37. DOI: 10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02

Schwartzel, E. (2020, April 28). 'Trolls World Tour' breaks digital records and charts a new path for Hollywood. *The Wall Street Journal*. https://www.wsj.com/articles/trolls-world-tour-breaks-digital-records-and-charts-a-new-path-for-hollywood-11588066202

Sperling, N. (2020, November 22). Hollywood's 'we're not in kansas anymore' moment. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/22/business/media/wonder-woman-1984-hollywood-streaming.html?auth=login-google

Sperling, N., & Barnes, B. (2020, September 15). Movie theaters returned. Audiences didn't. Now what? *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/15/business/media/tenet-movie-theaters-coronavirus.html?searchResultPosition=5

Spilker, H. & Colbjørnsen, T. (2020). The dimensions of streaming: toward a typology of an evolving concept. *Media, Culture & Society*, *42*(7-8) 1210-1225. DOI: 10.1177/0163443720904587

Sundar, S., & Limperos, A. (2013). Uses and grats 2.0: New gratifications for new media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *57*(4), 504-525. DOI: 10.1080/08838151.2013.845827

Tefertiller, A. (2017). Moviegoing in the Netflix age: Gratifications, planned behavior, and theatrical attendance. *Communication & Society*, *30*(4), 27-44. DOI: 10.15581/003.30.3.27-44

Tefertiller, A. (2018). Media substitution in cable cord-cutting: The adoption of web-streaming television. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 62*(3), 390-407. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2018.1451868

Tefertiller, A., Maxwell, L., & Morris, D. (2020). Social media goes to the movies: Fear of missing out, social capital, and social motivations of cinema attendance. *Mass Communication and Society, 23*(3), 378-339. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1653468

Tefertiller, A. & Sheehan, K. (2019) TV in the streaming age: Motivations, behaviors, and satisfaction of post-network television, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 63*(4), 595-616. DOI: 10.1080/08838151.2019.1698233

United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc., 334 U.S. 131 (1948). https://www.justice.gov/atr/paramount-decree-review#:~:text=First%2C%20the%20Supreme%20Court%20ordered,distribution%20operations%20or%20their%20theatres.&text=None%20of%20the%20Paramount%20defendants%20own%20a%20significant%20number%20of%20movie%20theatres.

Whitten, S. (2020, September 19). Movie theaters in jeopardy as studios move blockbusters to 2021, audiences stay home. *CNBC*, https://www.cnbc.com/2020/09/29/coronavirus-movie-industry-studios-move-blockbusters-audiences-stay-home.html

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

1) Describe your typical usage of streaming services.

     1-a) Has this changed due to the pandemic?

2) How often did you go to the movie theater before the pandemic?

     2-a) Has your movie theater attendance been altered by the pandemic?

3) Is your satisfaction with watching a new film like *Wonder Woman: 1984* at home on HBOMax the same as it would be in theaters?

4) Are there significant differences between seeing a film in theaters and streaming at home?

     4-a) Are factors such as cost, distractions, social interaction, and the visual experience comparable or different in your opinion?

5) Have you avoided going to the movie theater because of the pandemic? If yes, why?

6) Do you plan on attending more movies in the theater after the threat of COVID-19 is minimized?

CONSENT FORM

Audience Habits and Preferences for Streaming and Theater-Going in the Age of

COVID-19 and Beyond

This focus group is intended to form an understanding of audience's streaming and movie-theater-going preferences and habits, and how they were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. You were selected as a participant in this study because the researcher is interested in audiences ages 18-24 who use video streaming services and watch movies at the movie theater frequently.

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the focus group at any time. Your name and identifying information will be changed so your responses will not be linked to you. No personal information will be available to anyone other than the researcher. There are no expected risks for participating in this focus group study. Your participation should take about one hour.

By staying on this Zoom call, you have given your consent for the researcher to use your comments about your video streaming service use and movie theater attendance. You have also consented to be recorded during this focus group discussion.

VITA

Taryn Valentine

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: AUDIENCE HABITS AND PREFERENCES FOR STREAMING AND THEATER-GOING IN THE AGE OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Mass Communications at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2021.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2019.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Multimedia Journalism at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2019.

Experience:

Graduate Teaching Assistant, School of Media and Strategic Communications, Oklahoma State University, August 2019-2021.

Bae, M. & Valentine, T. Coping Strategies initiated by COVID-19 related stress, motives for social media use, and perceived stress reduction. AEJMC Midwinter Conference, University of Oklahoma, 5 March, 2021