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RESEARCH NOTE

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF COMEDY IN SOCIETY

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Comedy is a multidimensional, diverse, and versatile spectacle, an identifiable art form and source of entertainment and it has a rich historical identity and purpose. It contributes to cultural identities and has more recently been proven to provide positive impacts in mental healthcare. It offers social and cultural benefit and influences social change. The growth of live comedy has a strong background in working-class venues, which has possibly predisposed it to being perceived as less significant than other performance arts such as dance and theater. Given the untapped potential for further research this empirical article sought to evaluate the potential opportunities for comedy to make a greater positive impact on local communities. To facilitate this, data were collected through surveys administered online and in comedy clubs in the West Midlands (UK). A total of 179 questionnaires were received, supported with in-depth interviews with comedy club managers. Key issues for live comedy engagement were found to include a lack of awareness, perceived price barriers, and a lack of publicity. Seventy percent of respondents agreed that live comedy could have a wider, positive social impact and also offers a platform to address difficult social issues. A number of participants expressed the importance of *communitas* and the opportunity to discuss difficult and sensitive issues in a structure-less state of liminality.

Key words: Comedy; Stand-up comedy; Live events; *Communitas*; Community; Social impact

Introduction

Comedy is a multidimensional, diverse, and versatile spectacle (Lockyer et al., 2011) and an identifiable art form and source of entertainment

(Riley, 2017). It has a rich historical identity and underlying purpose (Czajkowski, 2012; Mintz, 1985), it contributes to cultural identities and has been proven to provide positive impacts in mental healthcare (Health Fitness Revolution, 2016).

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Though it is not always regarded in the same categories as theater and dance, the live comedy industry has achieved significant growth and therefore deserves greater attention (Chortle, 2017).

Comedy has, in recent years, come to be recognized as an important phenomenon deserving of further investigation, with Lockyer (2016) and O'Hara (2016) classifying academic researchers intrigued by humor as "humorologists." The inception of The International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS) publish both quarterly and biannual journals for the industry (O'Hara, 2016), highlights the significance of comedy, reinforced in the UK with the creation of the Centre for Comedy Studies Research (CCSR) at Brunel University in 2014. Jeffries (2014) also identified the formation of CCSR as the sign that comedy is finally being taken seriously as a topic for academic research. All investigations at the CCSR are "strongly underpinned by the belief that comedy is socially, culturally, artistically, politically and economically significant at local, national and international levels" (Lockyer, 2016, p. 154).

A number of articles, journals, and documents often highlight particularly outstanding achievements; for example Logan (2014b), Chortle (2017), and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Ltd (2018) each document a successful milestone in comedy festivals across the UK. That said, academic literature is scarce. Lockyer and Myers (2011) identified a particular gap in the market in the analysis of other dynamics that contribute to the success of a live performance, influencing a collection of articles discussed further in the literature review.

The first robust investigation into comedy attendance, demographics, preferences, and motivations (Mermiri et al., 2014) was delivered through the State of Play: Comedy UK report but was considered out of date within a few months of its publication (Lockyer, 2016). Secondary research by Lockyer and Myers (2011), Mermiri et al. (2014), and O'Hara (2016) all concluded that live comedy provides fertile ground for further research. Currently only limited research has been undertaken to establish the potential benefits for health and wellbeing and the challenges associated with delivering these. Although this project was carried out pre-Covid, it is worth noting that several studies

now highlight concerns about an increasing mental health crisis as a result of restrictions, isolation, and a lack of access to medical support (Lee, 2020). Although attendance at live events is severely limited, access to comedy through other formats may have an important role to play in supporting those struggling with their mental health.

A History of Stand up

The traditions of stand-up comedy are rooted in working men's clubs and politically affiliated environments, especially in the north of the UK. However, prior to 1968 the rise in television and radio saw traditional music halls close due to a severe lack of revenue, reducing the number of venues available for live comedy; 1979 saw the rise of "alternative comedy" and the opening of the first club, The Comedy Store, in London, marking the beginning of a comedy revolution (Logan, 2010).

Comedy has been seen as a lesser art form in comparison to theater and dance, which may explain the lack of current research as well as the lack of funding available (Greene, 2016; Sherwood, 2007). Britain's creative industries generated around £84 billion in 2014 (no more up to date figures have been produced), and is still growing each year, yet comedy has not been viewed as important for funding and grant opportunities (Hytner, 2017; Reyes, 2017). The value of the comedy industry alone is "absolutely massive," yet public money is fed into other cultural art forms and the amount that comedy receives is "virtually nil" (Mills, as cited in Fleming, 2013). The Arts Council England continue to defend their decision to not fund comedy as they believe it "tends to be a commercially self-sustaining performance form," by stating that costs are low and more than covered with good ticket prices and audience numbers, though any shows developing into theatrical pieces may receive funding. This suggests that that comedy is less valued as a stand-alone art form (O'Hara, 2016).

The Construction of Stand Up

Double (2005) created a multilateral definition of stand-up comedy that considers personality (the comedian), direct communication (audience interaction), and present tense (contemporary relevance

and the ability to address issues such as phones ringing or heckling in the crowd). Several studies suggest that an audience is imperative for stand-up comedy to work (Double, 2005; Katevas et al., 2015; Lockyer & Myers, 2011). Czajkowski (2012) believed that core comedy fans value both the jokes and the mechanism and structure of delivery, noting comedy is an intricate art that is broadly, but not exclusively believed to rely on the audience to function (Greene, 2016; Řičný, 2014).

Fleming (2012) suggested that the key to remaining successful in comedy is taking care of the audience. Lockyer and Myers' (2011) study of audience perspectives of live stand-up comedy found that, though 93% of respondents admitted to liking stand up, only 62% actually attend the live shows. Of the 62%, just 19% go to three or more shows a year. The "State of Play: Comedy UK Report" found similar statistics from their research; 50% of their respondents, representing the UK population, had been to at least one live stand-up show within the last 3 years, but only 15% attend due to their interest in comedy (Mermiri et al., 2014).

Of respondents, 51% will only see a comedian that they know of and have seen on television before. A number of related factors are cited as reasons for increased interest in comedy including: Increased exposure to stand-up-based comedy television shows (such as *Live at the Apollo* and *Michael McIntyre's Comedy Roadshow*); the rise of comedians employed to voiceover or present other fields of television work (such as *Question Time*); the growth of stand-up artist's book releases achieving high sales figures; Celebrity comedy tours that now regularly see comedy giants sell out multiday arena shows across the UK (for example Jason Manford, Alan Carr, and John Bishop) (Harvey, 2010; Lockyer & Myers, 2011; Logan, 2010). Of the UK population, 83% own a stand-up comedy DVD of one of the bigger names in the industry (Mermiri et al., 2014).

Comedy as Event

A number of factors are given as a reason for declining attending at live stand up, including audiences wanting to see familiar faces as well as comedians being "unadventurous" and "boring" (Chortle, 2012). The relatively cheap set-up costs

for hosting a comedy night led to an overcrowded market for live stand up and the scale of success arising from television appearances initiated many comedians to trial the occupation, with safe and unoriginal material, in an attempt to reach the limelight (Chortle, 2012; Harvey, 2010). Not all jokes work well over television as some acts do not translate well in the format, particularly when they are creating jokes to match demand, rather than focusing on quality (Logan, 2010).

Though smaller venues are more likely to be impacted by competition and recessions (Chortle, 2012; Grant, 2016), these are also the places where audiences and comedians alike prefer to see/perform live comedy. Quirk (2011) concluded that venue choice is a critical factor for influencing audience behaviors and reactions, thus leading to the overall success of the show. According to Lockyer and Myers' (2011) study, 53% prefer to see live stand-up comedy in the much smaller setting of a comedy club (in comparison to 40% in small arenas/theaters, then 39% in a medium-sized club). Large arenas were the usual venue for 38% of the audience, yet only the favored place for 15% of all those surveyed. Although commercial propositions invariably prefer arena tours so too do comedians keen to compete with each other for market share (Dessau, 2013; Kelley, 2015). However, some prefer the traditions of stand up and only perform in pubs, clubs, and, at most, theaters. Comedian Ed Byrne believes comedy loses its intimacy in larger venues and thinks the ticket costs for arena shows are unjustified (McIver, 2013). Billy Connolly and Sarah Millican are further examples of those who do not agree with the commercialization of arena tours (Dessau, 2013). The importance of audience intimacy in stand-up comedy should not be underestimated (Ross, 1998). It is the lack of atmosphere compared to more intimate venues that is frequently cited as an issue. The distance must be kept minimal between the performer and the spectators to ensure full engagement potential (Bennett, 1997) because audiences appreciate "proximity and intimacy" (Lockyer & Myers, 2011). However, without the demand for arena comedy and UK/worldwide tours the live comedy industry would not be the mainstream and continuously growing field of success that it is today (Epstein, 2012; Kelley, 2015).

The comedy scene in the UK has been labeled as the “liveliest in the world” (Logan, 2014b; Schamaun, 2014). The Edinburgh Fringe Festival is considered the largest arts festival in the world (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Ltd., 2018). Schamaun (2014) believed this success is down to risk taking with alternative comedy, whereas Logan (2014b) argued it is the global reach as a result of television, radio, and online coverage. A large proportion of the shows subsequently tour the UK, attracting media attention and sustaining the growth of the industry (Logan, 2014b).

Comedy Destinations

For some places, comedy contributes to cultural identity; Edinburgh, Blackpool, and Leicester have rich comedy cultures (Owen, 2017). The Edinburgh Fringe Festival generates over a quarter of a billion pounds worth of additional tourism for Scotland and an outstanding 93% of the Fringe visitors believe it makes Edinburgh “special” as a city (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Ltd., 2011). In Blackpool, the Comedy Carpet represents a celebration of over 1,000 comedians and comedy writers and draws crowds of tourists each year.

Leicester now hosts the largest and longest-running comedy festival in the UK (Owen, 2017). The 1994 start out showcased 40 events across 23 venues, attracting an audience of 5,000 for the week-long festival (Chortle, 2017; Owen, 2017), bringing around £3 million to the local economy (Chortle, 2017). Sponsored by the television channel Dave, the Leicester Comedy Festival is showcased by the organization “Big Difference Company,” who look to use the platform to create awareness through crowd-funding campaigns and raise funds for new talents and recognition (Logan, 2014a; Owen, 2017). Geoff Rowe, director of Big Difference Company, suggests the success of the festival is a result of producing one-off, unique events that are difficult to replicate and therefore draw attention (Logan, 2014a), while the organizations charitable objectives include “the promotion of good health and wellbeing through the arts.”

Other notable festivals included That’s Fife Festival, the Mach Fest, the Great Yorkshire Fringe, Brighton Comedy Festival, and the Bath Comedy Festival—all successful events that are growing

annually despite a lack of funding (Dobie, 2016; The Mission Theatre, 2016). Comedy, long thought of as an element of identity making, is referenced in some of these events. Examples include the Women in Comedy Festival and the Oddball Comedy Festival where routines are specifically designed to highlight social justice issues and encourage the audience to review their perspectives (Evans, 2016). Women in comedy has been a key topic in recent years, with the BBC also introducing a criterion for at least one female comedian to be a part of the lineup for any panel show aired (Addley, 2016). Lowe investigated a range of panel shows over the last 50 years and found that the numbers of women representatives have significantly increased, with around 33% of current lineups being female compared to just 3% during the 60’s and 70’s (Lowe, as cited in Addley, 2016).

Comedy, Health, and Well-Being

As a platform for historical and cultural identity comedy offers a social experience and has been proven to have positive impacts in relation to mental health problems (Health Fitness Revolution, 2016; Mintz, 1985; Riley, 2017). The benefits could be much greater than is recognized in current studies (Carlstrom, 2013) as an artform able to narrate and negotiate empowerment, social justice, and societal difference (Jeffries, 2014). Comedy also fulfils a social and cultural role in everyday life and offers an opportunity to discuss complex issues and potentially influence social change on a larger scale without animosity (Jenkins, 2015; Lockyer, 2012; Mintz, 1985). Amy Schumer is referenced as an example of a comedienne using her status to address social issues in a way the audience can respond (Woods, 2017). However, difficult topics must be tackled in a way that strikes the balance of challenging and critiquing current potential beliefs in a humorous way, in order to have a positive impact and not come across as an attack (Lockyer, 2012). Carlstrom (2013) noted that comedy is often mistaken as being offensive, but “offense is taken, not given,” a view supported by Ford (2016), observing that somebody will always be offended.

It is widely recognized that many comedians suffer from mental health issues including depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder (Code Bara, 2015;

Logan, 2011). David Granirer is a stand-up comic who suffers from depression but finds that sharing laughter helps treat his illness. He set up a therapy course to treat disorders and phobias (Barrell, 2016). Using methods of writing stand-up scripts from everyday experiences, clients have found that making a joke out of a situation and taking control actually makes positive progress towards coping and recovery. Glasgow charity Universal Comedy offer a similar course providing a creative platform to build confidence in those with mental health issues (Chortle, 2011). Though it is only a temporary fix, comedy can be used as a coping method to uplift spirits (Ford, 2016; Hughes, 2016; Weems, 2014). This works as there are “no language barriers in comedy” (Dayani & Lytle, 2011). Laughter releases serotonin, or “happy hormones,” which relieve stress and boost well-being and engagement (Barton, 2017; Beard, 2014). Research found that even the anticipation of laughter can lower the stress levels of three hormones by at least 38%, as well as having physical benefits of being a muscle relaxer (Health Fitness Revolution, 2016). Comedy is now being used within the workplace to boost morale, encourage creativity, and “break down barriers” to create much happier workplaces (Williams, 2016).

Comedians have the ability to find common ground for everyone, no matter their background, to form a bond and connect people through laughter and release (Barton, 2017). Audiences usually represent different cultures, demographics, age categories, and social status, yet in the moment they are all part of a *communitas* of experience that only these specific circumstances can create (Gavanas, 2008; Turner, 1969). Van-Gannep et al. (1961) formed the “triadic model of the Rite of Passage,” which illustrated that to transfer from one social status to another there are three stages: disengagement, liminality, and reintegration (or postliminal). This state of transformation would suggest that connection and unity at a live comedy event offers the ideal opportunity to discuss usually difficult social issues, at a time where the audience can be open to alternative views, without associating their normal circumstances that would otherwise influence their reaction. Tackling difficult subjects is a common theme at the Edinburgh Fringe (Double, 2017).

Research around the mental health benefits of comedy (and humor) (Beard, 2014) is well

established, and there are numerous examples of comedy being used a therapy for a range of mental health conditions including schizophrenia (Cai et al., 2014), low self-esteem, patients in long-term care (Adams & McGuire, 1986), undergraduate students with mental health issues (White & Camarean, 1989), and patients recovering from orthopedic procedures (Rotton & Shats, 1996). Attempts to correlate personal sense of humor and mental health have been less definitive (Martin, 2003) despite a number of attempts to evaluate these relationships (Frewen et al., 2008; Kuiper et al., 2004; Martin et al., 2003; Saroglou & Scariot, 2002).

Despite the limitations of existing research, evidence points toward an intriguing possibility: self-enhancing and affiliative comedy might complement Prozac, spiritual quests, therapy sessions, and other mental health-enhancing products that help stave off depression and anxiety (Beard, 2014). Research has consistently shown that exposure to a range of different political comedy forms encourage individuals to feel more confident about their own ability to influence and engage with politics (Becker, 2011, 2014; Hoffman & Thomson, 2009).

Given the clear evidence that comedy is beneficial to health, communities, and the economy, it evidentially has an important role to play in social regeneration and personal health and well-being. Given that Iqbal (2020) suggested that the UK is “sleepwalking” to a mental health crisis due to an already underfunded mental health service before the coronavirus pandemic, it is likely that non-medical activities that help individuals cope with difficult circumstances will play an increasingly important role postcrisis. Therefore, it is even more important to verify the benefits and understand how to minimize barriers to participation.

Research Methodology

Most data for this study were collected through self-completion questionnaires. A pilot questionnaire was tested with six participants to address any inconsistencies and unreliable results. Questionnaires were then made available in hard copy within several local comedy clubs and online using Survey Monkey through Comedy Club Facebook

pages. Although this is a potential limitation of the research method it was important to ensure that feedback represented individuals with experience of live comedy. Future studies would benefit from a wider sampling technique to provide greater generalizability within the data and to test the findings from this study more widely. SPSS was used to examine the data to identify any emergent themes. The questionnaires were designed to investigate audience demographics, motivations, and barriers for participation, comedy destinations, and perceived benefits of comedy. In addition, two semi-structured interviews with industry experts were carried out. These were recorded and accurately transcribed. Interviewing time in total was around 120 min.

These interviews were carried out to garner some sense of industry perspectives. The two participants, who have given consent to be inclusive in the result analysis were Mark Tughan, Chief Executive of the Glee Club Comedy Club chain, and Geoff Rowe, Chief Executive of Big Difference Company. For these two semistructured interviews, the questions were kept short and simple to avoid bias and allow easy interpretations for their perceptions of the themes raised, ensuring valid and reliable responses.

Findings of the Research

From a total of 179 respondents, the gender divide was almost a direct 40:60 male/female split, which is not quite reflective of the 50:50 audiences cited by Mermiri et al. (2014). The results could be reflective of those more willing to participate in a questionnaire. Survey responses were received from across the UK representing a breadth but not depth of population.

Though the survey had more female interaction, the classification of age groups across the two genders shows a very similar pattern. Of the responses, 50% were from those aged 18–25 and 36–45. The 26–35 and 46–59 categories also contributed to over 20% of responses each, with fewer responses from those over 60. Lockyer and Myers (2011) also found fewer older people interested in comedy, so it may be an accurate representation of attendance.

The most common attendances at live comedy events across all age groups are either 1–2 times or

9+ times, per annum. Within the 26–35 age group all respondents have attended at least one event in the last year, which echoes Mermiri et al. (2014) who noted that 25–34 year olds were most likely to see live stand up (72%). As 38% of all respondents attended 9+ events it may be live comedy can be seen as either a very occasional activity, referred to here as “casual attenders” or something that individuals frequently attend as “comedy enthusiasts.” More frequent attendance happens more often in the noticeably more common in the southern regions and northern regions. Infrequent attendance is far more common among midlands audiences. The north may be explained by the traditional role of comedy while the southern region reflects greater opportunity and a broader range of venues and events to attend. Mermiri et al. (2014) found London to be the home of the most frequent comedy attendees for these reasons.

One of the key issues for this research was to establish the motivations for attending comedy events. The survey results say much more about barriers to attendance than motivations for attending, with price (28%) and lack of awareness (45%) being cited as key issues for potential attendees. Those who attend less frequently are much more likely to be seeing a specific act than those who attend more frequently, and a number of respondents were interested in taking part, either by becoming a performer or looking for new acts. Common motivations such as nights out with friends tend to be proportionate across all age ranges. Given that even those attending over 9 events a year suggest they would attend more often if they knew more about upcoming shows suggests that publicity and advertising (which relied to a large extent on funding) may be something to consider for both venues and comedians.

It was also noted that most of those who attend regularly earn less than the national average salary (noting comedy find its origins amongst working classes), while the willingness to pay for tickets increases in line with the celebrity status of the performer. Willingness to purchase tickets didn't change relative to income but those on lower incomes were prepared to spend more than those on higher incomes to see lesser-known acts. The data suggests that the 33.5% are prepared to pay £21–£30 to see a well-known comedian and 28.5%

are willing to spend £31–£40. The most popular response for lesser-known comedians, conversely, is £6–£10, followed by £11–£15 highlighting the importance of celebrity comedians (Chortle, 2012; Czajkowski, 2013; Logan, 2010) who therefore play an important role in promoting comedy to a wider audience. Of the respondents, 30% attend a comedy show to see a specific act. According to Mermiri et al. (2014), 60% of comedy ticket sales are for the five largest shows each year alone. Almost a quarter of respondents attend live shows with friends, some of whom may be unfamiliar with the shows they are going to see.

This is unsurprising as Mermiri et al. (2014) identified that live comedy was seen as an important social experience (75% attend in groups of 3 or more). Lockyer and Myers (2011) also found the majority of participants attend with friends. In the interviews Rowe noted that audiences “want an experience, so the more live comedy can embrace this and offer something ‘different’ to the public, the better.” Less than 3% of the 179 participants attend comedy for an alternative experience or due to an interest in a specific venue.

Although this research suggests that audiences are polarized at each end of a spectrum of attendance Tughan considers the audience differently, as either “The night out with friends, or celebrations and parties etc. who are happy with mixed bill comedy” or “The audience for solo touring shows.”

Chortle (2012) also identified these two distinct classifications when discussing the growth of “celebrity comedy” in comparison to declining attendance at live comedy nights.

Importantly, and unlike previous studies, 17 respondents (9%) highlighted that comedy is also a feature of major music festivals that often host a comedy stage. Examples included V-Festival and the Reading and Leeds Festivals, highlighting new opportunities to promote comedy (and its benefits) to new audiences. This is a potentially important opportunity to introduce wider narratives to audiences. Rowe suggested that:

TV comedy has helped broaden the market for live comedy; more comedians are getting exposure which helps us promote them to audiences. The fact that comedians are fronting adverts and being used to “voiceover” TV shows can have a huge impact in their appeal to members of the public.

Given that Tughan suggested that poor quality venues are an issue rather than the price point, and Rowe noted that marketing and promotion are a real challenge, citing a decreasing diversity among performers as a potential concern, there are clearly some important challenges for the sector to overcome. Crosstabulation of results shows a really strong preference for more intimate venues, which was also observed by Lockyer and Myers (2011) and Mermiri et al. (2014). Rowe believes “audiences want comedy within their own specific ‘communities’ rather than visiting new and unfamiliar venues.”

Most respondents when asked on a Likert scale to identify when they would most likely see a comedian they have never heard of are more likely to do this on a night out with friends (30 of 137), to see a specific act (24) while the use of chi-square tests show that the reason for attending a comedy event and likelihood of seeing someone unheard of is very dependable and therefore the responses are not coincidental.

Perceived Social Impacts

As discussed in the literature review, comedy is believed to bring potential sociocultural benefits in a variety of ways, though it is not always necessarily recognized (Health Fitness Revolution, 2016; Hughes 2016; Logan, 2011; Riley, 2017). Whether it be part of a city’s cultural identity, a health benefit, or an opportunity to address issues, comedy provides a platform for a variety of positive influences.

130 respondents either agree or strongly agree that stand-up comedy has a wider positive social impact on either individuals or the local area, and 144 believe that it provides an opportunity to discuss difficult social issues, representing 80% of the sample population. Both Tughan and Rowe agree that comedy can play an important role in this regard:

I think comedians can talk about issues which are sometimes seen as taboos in society and can help mainstream them . . . performances have had a positive impact on the general view of mental health—sometimes from a very personal perspective—and this can help. I also think comedians have helped mainstream issues to do with sexuality and this has had a positive impact on general opinions. (Rowe)

Comedy is even playing its part in the sexism debate right now: it's great territory for satire—that's got to be good? It's less good on traditional politics but that's still an important niche. (Tughan)

Respondents also noted that as a social event comedy creates an atmosphere that cannot be replicated at home, a view that echoes Lockyer and Myers (2011) and Mermiri et al. (2014). Forty percent of participants believe that the atmosphere is a key issue, with respondent #78 observing the importance of co-creation: "the audience are as much a part of a good comedy night as the performers," reflecting Double's (2005) view on the interrelationship between the audience and the comedian. Twenty respondents noted the importance of the sense of community that is created. The most interesting result in this part of the questionnaire is the idea of a "temporary community," which at that specific moment in time, in that specific venue, no one's social status, age, or demographics matter—they are sharing the experience together and enjoying it at the same level (Barton 2017; Gavanis, 2008).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Comedy is an innovative and versatile artform that plays an important role in everyday life (Code Bara, 2015). Recent research has started to focus on the importance of comedy to society (Lockyer, 2016), yet it continues to receive little to no funding (Sherwood, 2007). This study has further demonstrated the importance of comedy to society, which supports and builds on previous studies. The role of comedy for health, politics, and participation should not be underestimated (Baumgartner & Lockerbie, 2018; Cao & Brewer, 2008; Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Hoffman & Young, 2011).

Interestingly, this research showed no distinct variations between age, gender, income, or social background, further highlighting the sense of community, which forms around comedy, removing persistent social stereotypes while facilitating discussion about contemporary social challenges. The survey highlighted the main motivation for attending a comedy show is to see a specific act, which is most likely a result of television coverage,


(Logan, 2010), or as a social activity with friends. Tughan stressed the factor that comedy audiences are split into those who attend solo tours and those who are on a "night out." One notable difference in these findings compared to the secondary data is the observation that 76.5% of the population are not motivated by seeing a live act they have seen on television. This finding disputes Mermiri et al.'s (2014) research, which suggests that this is important to 51% of people. This suggests that participants are willing to attend mixed-billing comedy, but may not know where to find it due to the lack of advertising that the industry is given.

The principal barriers for live comedy were found to be lack of awareness and price. The former is a particular issue because comedy is underfunded and evidently needs to increase revenues in order to attract greater audiences. Only by achieving greater awareness will the wider public benefit from access to stand up. There was also a sense from the interviews that some people may have experienced poor-quality events in poorly managed venues and will base future likelihood of attendance on those experiences. Rowe believes that television is great for publicity which, in turn, promotes touring shows and appearances at festivals. As 70% of participants agree that live comedy can have a wider, positive social impact and offers a platform to address difficult social issues greater access is important. So too is the platforming of comedy within other event settings such as festivals (Jeffries, 2014; Jenkins, 2015; Lockyer, 2012).

Although there are opportunities for further research this study has brought together a number of issues that suggest that comedy could play a more important role in social, economic, and physical regeneration, impacting on people and places positively. Testing these findings with a wider population would be beneficial to start to further explore ways in which access to comedy could be better supported. Although not discussed or considered within the study, there are other ways in which people may be able to engage with, and benefit from, comedy. For example, no consideration was given in this study to accessing comedy online, or as downloadable material. These are potential ways to enhance access, though such approaches may not provide the wider social benefits described earlier in this study. This is an area that is ripe for further

research. Many of the benefits of comedy are not currently recognized by the wider population or adopted within the healthcare or well-being industries as an alternative therapy, yet evidence exists to suggest this is worthy of further investigation.

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