

# Theatre allows people to lose themselves for a moment, and find new ways of viewing the world

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This research was conducted by **Ben Walmsley** at **Leeds Metropolitan University, UK** [Now at the **University of Leeds, UK**]

## Summary

The paper looks at the intrinsic impact of theatre on its audiences. It does so in language used by audiences themselves. The research identified general themes of 'emotion, captivation, engagement, enrichment, escapism, wellbeing, world view and addiction' that describe the types of impact that theatre has on people. The author surmises that 'catharsis' and 'flow' are key aspects of the theatregoing experience that encourage the full force of these impacts.

## The findings are based on 34 interviews with theatregoers

The interviews were conducted with audiences at West Yorkshire Playhouse and Melbourne Theatre Company in Australia. An additional eight interviews were conducted with theatre staff at these venues. The interviews were carefully constructed so as to provide a comparable dataset that was analysed using software that looks for themes in the words that people used. The interviews were also sufficiently open-ended that individual responses could be probed for further explanation.

## People experienced a variety of impacts from theatre

The impacts that people described related to the ways in which provided a form of escape from the realities of life. Another prominent theme was the

immersive nature of experience, where people took delight in getting lost in a story. The ways that people responded to the questions also reflected their expectations of theatre and the role it plays in their lives. Some people saw theatre as emotionally and intellectually integral to their lifestyles, whereas others simply used it as a form of entertainment.

## Keywords

**flow** **survey** **social** **catharsis** **theatre** **UK** **audience** **experience**  
**Australia**

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