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# Music Performance Attendance and Happiness

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## Music Performance Attendance and Happiness\*

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## ABSTRACT

How are the performing arts and happiness sociologically connected? I propose that people who have attended a music performance in the last 12 months will report an increase in happiness. Additional knowledge-besides attending Arts-related events-is required in order to understand what makes people happy. I analyzed 2016 General Social Survey (GSS) data. The *N* for this sample is 1,272. Personal happiness is directly tied to one's financial situation and their educational attainment levels and not to attendance at music performances. The results indicate that satisfaction with finances has a greater impact on happiness, and that White people also report being happier on average. Being satisfied with your financial situation has more of an impact on personal happiness than one's years of education.

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## Music Performance Attendance and Happiness

Happiness is a concept with a broad meaning in sociology because it is under the umbrella of quality of life. According to Veenhoven for example, happiness is the positive evaluation that individuals ascribe to their lives in whole, or just specific parts (Greco, et al. 2015). Specifically, social researchers have been asking “How *do* we measure happiness?” The General Social Survey (GSS)—which was created to measure and study attitudes and trends—is a tool that researchers can use to measure and operationalize happiness. In particular, this study will examine the impact of attending a musical performance on individual happiness. Even more specifically, the inquiry here will draw on whether or not attending a music performance in the past 12 months will have a positive impact on an individual’s happiness. The curiosity behind this question comes from the fact that people often gravitate towards music, and often get a sense of joy from listening to it. Also, some of the literature used for this study mentioned how creating music gives people a sense of joy. Thus, leading to the question of: if creating music leads to a boost in happiness, then so should attending a music performance.

In measuring happiness, we have to find out the causal mechanisms of individual happiness. Investigating said causal mechanisms of individual happiness becomes especially complex when we add the music aspect because there is limited U.S.-based research on music and concert attendance. However, we do know that music can induce feelings of happiness, reflection, and sadness. Kreutz, et al. (2008) addresses this by conducting a study on 99 adults where each were given 25 classical music excerpts that were representative of happiness,

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sadness, fear, anger and peace. One of their findings showed that the induction of happiness and peace was “uniform and strong.” This shows us that music does impact listeners’ emotions.

Next, one may wonder about the sociological relevance of music to begin with. Phillip Bohlman argues that “music can be conceptualized as both object and activity” (Roy and Dowd 2010:184). Simply put, when we see music as solely as an object, we tend to forget about the historical context. Conversely, when music is seen as a process/activity, we are bound to accept it as something that is ongoing and ever-changing. Once we see music as an activity, we can begin to understand music as “deeply social”. In order for concerts to happen, for example, there has to be an interactive and collaborative staging in order to produce a great show. Therefore, the "deeply social" part comes into play when we recognize music as something that impacts individuals and something that has meaning.

To put it another way, Tia DeNora, writes that “Music may serve, for example, as a model of self, a resource for articulating and stabilizing self-identity” (2004:158). In other words, in order to articulate what makes up our identities, music can serve as an instrument to describe a part of ourselves to others. This idea of articulating what constitutes our identities can be related to one of the theories that is being used for this study— collective effervescence. Although the details of this theory will be discussed later on, essentially, collective effervescence is the explanation of what brings people together. To say the least, it is the joy and comfort we gain from sharing a common activity.

The joy and comfort we gain from sharing a common activity leads to us to the question of how a person’s happiness combines with music. These are two phenomenon that have been studied separately. Yet, as previously stated, it has been shown that music has a strong effect on our emotions. The aim here is to probe the sociological relationship between emotions and

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concert attendance. I specifically examine music performance attendance as being a predictor of one's happiness. This is, perhaps, one of many ways to understand how happiness and music could be integrated in a sociological lens.

Because past research has indicated that actually creating music and/or any other Arts-related medium has a positive impact on one's perceived quality of life (Michalos 2004, 2008), the inquiry here will be to examine if participating in Arts-related activities (i.e.: going to a concert) will have the same impact. I will be controlling for age, satisfaction with one's finances, race, education attainment level, and sex. I also hypothesize that individuals who have gone to concerts in the last 12 months will report being happier than those who did not.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Happiness is a concept that has been studied in great detail by social science researchers over the years (Ball and Chernova 2008; Michalos 2004; Michalos 2008; Veenhoven 1991; Veenhoven 2008; Veenhoven 2014; Veenhoven 2015; Musikanski 2017; Van der Horst and Coffé 2012; Baker and Palmer 2006). The GSS has asked American individuals the question of how happy they are since its inception in the 1970s. This literature review will look at several themes including subjective well-being, arts and arts-related activities on perceived quality of life, and demographic factors on perceived quality of life. In order to establish a level of congruency between this study and the literature used, the above themes will be used.

### *Subjective Well-Being*

Past literature has studied some indicators that lead to happiness. These include but are not limited to friends, family, and income (Van der Horst and Coffé 2012; Alderson and Katz-Gerro 2016; Ball and Chernova 2008; Daykin, de Viggiani, Moriarty, and Pilkington 2017; Greco, Holmes, and McKenzie 2015). For starters, drawing on philosophy, Greco, et al. (2015)

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discuss the idea of *Eudaimonia*, which translates to “good spirit”. Yet, when Aristotle was describing the concept, he considered it to be fixed. In agreement with the authors, Greco, et al. argue that *Eudaimonia* is subjective to social constructs, thereby making it pliable. They argue how happiness is not well defined in social contexts unless we consider social interaction. They continue to argue that “social and active democratic participation in a country have a strong impact on subjective well-being.” They define social participation as (local) community engagement. Active democratic participation, on the other hand, can be interpreted as voting and general participation in government. They then point out that both sets of social participation “also fosters happiness by giving individuals a sense of having control and being part of society” (p. 23). Finally, Van der Horst and Coffé (2012), suggest that friends boost trust, health, and social support. These factors are greatly correlated to subjective well-being.

### *The Arts and Arts-related Activities on Perceived Quality of Life*

While the terms “happiness”, “quality of life”, and “subjective well-being” have been used throughout this paper based on the literature, the focus will be on happiness and its intersection with arts and culture (Michalos 2004; Michalos 2008; Lizardo 2006; Daykin, Moriarty, and Pilkington 2017; Boer, et al. 2011). It is also worth noting that quality of life is a comprehensive term. On that note, despite being a British Columbian researcher, Michalos (2004) is perhaps one of few scholars to research the intersection between social indicators and health-related quality of life. He defines social indicators as “a term denoting a subject class and a term denoting...an 'indicator property'” (p. 30). We need to keep the definition of a social indicator in mind as the Arts and Arts-related activities are the indicators presented to have an impact on quality of life.

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Michalos (2004, 2008) studied whether or not the Arts and Arts-related activities have a positive impact on individuals' quality of life. In the first study, he makes a great attempt to do research on how the Arts impact people's subjective well-being. Michalos did this by mailing out surveys to a random sample of British Columbian households to test out how arts-related activities actually shape people's lives. In the second study, he expands on the first using the same method. In his first study, he came across other researchers who wrote about music in therapeutic settings and music's positive impact on health, which is the reason behind both of his studies. Despite this, the impact of music on health may not be as sufficient as some other scholars would have hoped. Even still, Michalos performed the same study again-but, with a bigger sample size. In both, there were 66 activities provided in the distributed surveys. What can be learned from both of the studies that Michalos conducted is that arts-related activities do explain some of the variation on perceived quality of life. Therefore, it can be argued that attending a music performance should have the same effect.

### *Demographic Factors on Perceived Quality of Life and Music*

Several studies have discussed the impact of demographic factors on happiness, subjective well-being, and/or quality of life, as well as music (Alderson and Katz-Gerro 2016; Artés, del Mar Salinas-Jiménez, and Salinas-Jiménez 2013; Ball and Chernova 2008; Easterlin 1995; Hays 2005; Katz-Gerro 1999; Roy and Dowd 2010; White 2001; Lam and Liu 2013; Schnittker 2008; Stets and Trettevik 2015; Millward, Widdop, and Halpin 2017). Before continuing, it is useful to know what is meant by demographic factors. These are simply characteristics found in any given population that can be statistically expressed like age, education, sex/gender, income level, and class. Therefore, the above studies focused on either one or more demographic factors. The first half had a special focus on the impact of said



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demographic factors on happiness/subjective well-being. Meanwhile, the other half had a special focus on demographic factors and their impact on music tastes. Demographic factors on perceived quality of life and music are crucial to understanding what can impact people's lives. Some predictors such as income, education, age, and race were used as controls in this study to gauge what can impact individual's happiness in addition to music performance attendance.

To synthesize, demographic factors, (e.g.: age, educational attainment level, and income), the arts/arts-related activities, and subjective well-being were the main ideas found throughout the literature. Demographic factors played a role in the formation of individual happiness and their music tastes. Said factors and their impact on perceived happiness will be analyzed in this particular study. In conducting this study, I want to understand if attending a concert will positively impact a person's happiness.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One theory and one principle will be used in this study. They are Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence and the principle of homophily. Collective effervescence, according to Benzecry and Collins (2014), is the process of feeling excitement when in close resonance to other participants. In addition, Stieler and Germelmann (2016) also state that respondents in their studies reported individual and intergroup emotions. In other words, they felt a common bond with other crowd members in conjunction with their own feelings. Attesting to this also is May (2010), who wrote his thesis on collective effervescence at concerts. He found that those concert-goers who were willing to travel and spend money on tickets were more likely to experience "high feelings of spirituality and community at concerts". Lastly, collective effervescence is a theory that has been studied by social scientists and psychologists alike. Torres, Moreira, and Lopes (2018), and Hopkins, et al. (2015) both attempted to analyze this theory from the

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attendees' point of view. What Hopkins, et al. found was among Hindu pilgrims in India, perceptions of shared identity had an indirect effect on positive experiences at events. This perception of shared identity occurred through an increase in participants' sense of enacting their collective identity and an increased sense of intimacy with others.

Next, the principle of homophily asserts that, essentially, "birds of feather flock together" (Mark 1998; Mark 2003; Millward, Widdop, and Halpin 2017; Zhou, Xu, and Zhao 2018). This concept will be—for the purposes of this study—examined through a cultural lens. Therefore, cultural homophily is people gathering and engaging in events based on like interests. How these theories apply to this study is sociologically important because of the Arts' impact on people and society, and the underlying question of whether individuals' participation in Arts-related activities has an impact on their perceived happiness.

Therefore, using the theory of collective effervescence, I expect concert attendance to affect happiness because of the shared set of emotions that can be gained from participating in crowd events. Even if a person walks into a concert feeling like they do not want to be there, they will eventually walk out feeling the opposite because of those around them. And in using the principal of homophily, I expect concert attendance to affect happiness because people gather out of like interests (e.g.: artists and musicians). When people share interests, this creates and solidifies bonds between individuals and groups alike.

## METHODS

### *Data*

I am analyzing 2016 General Social Survey data (Smith, Davern, Freese, and Hout 2016). The data were collected primarily by way of face-to-face interviews. If this did not work, computer-assisted interview programs and phone interviews were also administered. The sample

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for this study is 1272 respondents out of 2867 total respondents. This became the case after dummifying and reverse coding my variables and removing my missing data, thus fitting the criteria I was looking for. The data were missing because of the amount people who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer. The people surveyed were Spanish and English-speaking, 18+ and non-institutionalized American individuals. The response rate was 61.3%. For more information on how the data were collected see, <http://gss.norc.org/faq>.

### *Variables*

Due to the research question, the independent variable is music performance attendance. Meanwhile, the dependent variable is general happiness. Respondents were asked: “Taken all together, how would you say things are these days—would say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not to happy?” The purpose is, once again, to see if music performance attendance has any bearing on an individual’s happiness. The standard control variables are age, sex, race, and educational attainment level. One more appealing control includes satisfaction with one’s current financial situation, as this will be my socioeconomic status indicator. It was necessary to rid the data of missing cases. This was done to ensure that the cases do not interfere with the data being studied. The reason why there were missing cases is because of how the main question for the independent variable was broken down. In other words, the independent variable (music performance attendance) is a subset of the original question: “You said in the last 12 months you attended a performance...was it a music, dance, or theater performance?” Additionally, some people did not want to give their age, or they were unsure of their happiness or education levels—all which contributed to the missing cases.

My recoding, therefore, addressed the missing cases. In order to capture both people who went to a performance and a music performance, I recoded the ones in the main performance

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question (as shown above) into the one's in the music performance question. The ones are respondents who answered 'yes' to going to a live performance and a music performance. After doing this initial recoding, I recorded the zeroes, twos and the 89s (which originally represented missing cases) as zeroes. This means that these values will be treated as 'no' responses. When removing the missing cases from the happiness, financial satisfaction, educational attainment and age variables, a similar process occurred. For both the happiness and financial satisfaction variables, the zeroes and eights were removed. For education, the 97s, and for age, the zeroes and 98s were removed.

All the variables were dummied on a one/zero basis, where one=Yes for the independent variable, one=White for race, and one=Women for sex. For race, Blacks and Others were recoded from two and three respectively, and collapsed into zero in order to get variation between Whites and People of Color. For sex, the twos were recoded into one's, thus giving us 'Women' as one.

Next, two other variables—one control (financial satisfaction) and the dependent (general happiness)—were reverse coded in order to achieve the aims of this study. The original questions for both were gauging if people were *not* financially satisfied and if they were *not* happy. This is not what I wanted to look at, but instead I wanted to look at if people *are* financially satisfied and if they *are* happy. This is how the GSS asked respondents about their financial satisfaction: “So far as you and your family are concerned, would you say that you are pretty well satisfied with your present financial situation, more or less satisfied, or not satisfied at all?” This is—as previously shown—similar phrasing with the general happiness question. The GSS asked: Taken all together, how would you say things are these days--would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy? This phrasing puts the more negative measure at the top or a

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number of three. Once again, this is the reason for reverse coding both financial satisfaction and happiness.

### *Analytic Strategy*

As previously stated, the goal here was to assess if one's happiness is related to music performance attendance. This relationship was explored through the General Social Survey. Based on the literature, I controlled for educational attainment level, financial satisfaction-as a socioeconomic status indicator-gender, race, and age. The majority of my variables were recoded for the purposes of this study.

## FINDINGS

### *Univariate Findings*

The mean for the independent variable was about .22 with a standard deviation of .413. This mean indicates that only 22% of Americans went to a music performance in the last year. The mean for the dependent variable was about 2.1 with a standard deviation of .683. On average, the above mean shows us that more Americans report being pretty happy than not. With an average of around 2.0, more people also report being more or less financially satisfied than not. Next, it is worth noting that the respondents are fairly well-educated, with an average of about 14 years of schooling and a standard deviation of approximately 3.0 (2.95). The mean indicates that this group has completed some post-secondary education. This group is also a bit older. The average respondent was just about 49 years old. Women made up more than 50% (52%) of the sample. And finally, Whites comprised of 73%. All of these results can be found in Table 1.

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### TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

#### *Bivariate Findings*

The bivariate findings/results between the dependent (happiness) and independent variable (music performance attendance) were not significant. Yet, happiness was statistically significant with educational attainment (.087) and financial satisfaction (.302). Meanwhile, music performance attendance was statistically significant with educational attainment, financial satisfaction, and respondent's age, respectively (.182, .073, and -.088). Next, the respondent's educational attainment level was correlated with being financially satisfied and White (.134 and .109). Interestingly, men in this sample also reported more being financially satisfied than women. Therefore, the inverse is also true at -.079. This sample also includes the fact that White people report more financial satisfaction (.149) and are older than non-Whites (.177). Finally, older respondents reported more financial satisfaction, on average (.111). All the previously stated results were found to be significant at the  $p < .01$  level. Further, despite comprising 52% of the sample, women went to concerts less than men. These results can be found in Table 2.

### TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

#### *Multivariate Findings*

The  $R^2$  is .097, which tells us that only 9.7% of the variance in happiness can be explained by all the other variables. The model for this sample was statistically significant at the .01 level—meaning that this model is different from the Y-only intercept model. The result for the independent variable, concert attendance, was not significant. Meanwhile, two controls—financial satisfaction and educational attainment levels, respectively—did hold significance.

What can be understood from the unstandardized coefficients, ( $b$ 's), is the average unit change in the dependent variable while controlling for the independents. There is little to no

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strength between the majority of all independents and the dependent variable. Once again, financial satisfaction and educational attainment had the largest strength of association on happiness. For every one unit increase in respondent's financial satisfaction, they gained .266 more points on the three-point scale of happiness at the  $p < .01$  level. And, for every one-year increase in education, respondents gained .010 more points on happiness. As for the standardized coefficients, ( $\beta$ 's), this tells us which variable(s) have the largest effect on the dependent. Being more satisfied with finances at .293 had the largest effect; and, education at .042 had the second largest. Last, the relationship between one's level of education and their general happiness does not occur at random with the same level of confidence as financial satisfaction. These results can be found in Table 3.

### TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

## DISCUSSION

The results and data for this study support the idea that the more financially satisfied someone is, the happier they will be, on average. Also, more Americans are willing to say that yes, they are satisfied with their financial situation than not. These concepts are based on the GSS questions and are purely subjective. Given these points, one's level of education is also a predictor of how happy someone is. Both financial satisfaction and educational attainment were consistently shown as predictors of happiness in the bivariate and multivariate results.

As for theory, the theory of collective effervescence states that we often feel the same feelings as others around us in group settings. Durkheim originally had formulated this theory to explain religious parishioners in worship environments. It has been shown that people experience their own emotions and feelings in conjunction to those of the larger group (Stieler and Germelmann 2016). Based on the findings for this study, it can be said that going to concerts is a

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classed activity. Therefore, collective effervescence does not hold up as a theory because the results show us that people attend concerts based on their educational levels and financial situation satisfaction.

Moreover, cultural homophily states that people come together and engage in events because of similar interests. This is similar to collective effervescence, but homophily in general is people assembling based on identity. Collective effervescence, on the other hand, is people assembling based on feelings and emotions associated with a particular event. This distinction is important because it is useful to know the difference between people gathering out of like interests versus feelings and emotions.

Based on these theories, a concert is a type of gathering. People often attend such gatherings because concerts have artists and/or acts that they like or at least familiar with. Most people can attest to the sense of joy in seeing and/or hearing artists that they like and know live. And, to harken back to homophily, our identities govern our cultural tastes. When we combine this with our feelings, concerts and similar events become extra special to us. Therefore, going to a music performance is something that has meaning because we place high value on it.

In conducting this study, one of my expectations was that people-more often than not-would attend concerts based on like interests and the feelings associated with attending a concert. However, just the first half of this statement panned out, based on my results. This means that those people who went to concerts in the past year went out of like interests and a common identity-be it satisfaction with finances and high educational attainment. In other words, the principle of homophily was upheld by this study's findings.

I found, however, that going to a musical performance does not have an impact on individuals' general happiness. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected. What this says about my



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literature is that said findings are consistent with the literature (Alderson and Katz-Gerro 2016; Ball and Chernova 2008; Easterlin 1995; Michalos 2004; Millward, Widdop, and Halpin 2017).

These pieces of literature are examples of class impacting one's happiness.

## CONCLUSION

This study looks at whether or not going to a musical performance had any effect on individual happiness. The data analyzed was from the 2016 General Social Survey. The controls were age, education, race, financial situation satisfaction, and sex. The data does not support the hypothesis that going to a music performance increases one's happiness. The same data analysis, however, does support that two control variables have statistical significance. They are: financial situation satisfaction and education. Those who have a greater perception of their financial situation and who are more educated (respectively) are more likely to report being happier, on average. There was one theory and one principle used for this study. They were the theory of collective effervescence and the principle of homophily. The theory of collective effervescence did not hold up to the findings of this study. Yet, the principle of homophily did.

The reason why collective effervescence did not hold up to the findings of this study is because people attended concerts outside of experiencing shared feelings, according to this study's findings. The principle of homophily states that we often gather based on commonality, (e.g.: gender, social status, race, etc.). Moreover, cultural homophily is gathering based on like interests. However, based on the findings for this study, people attended concerts because of class and social status-namely those who were more educated and reported more financial satisfaction.

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### *Limitations*

One limitation of this study is that the GSS did not ask the about frequency of attending a live performance. The survey only focuses on a dichotomous answer to see if people have gone to music performance. Perhaps asking about frequency of concert attendance would have more significance on happiness because going to more than one concert over time could lead to an increase in happiness.

Another limitation is that there is limited research on attending live performances (e.g.: theatre, dance, and/or music) individual emotional states, particularly in sociology. Obtaining the measurement of individual emotional states at live performances may require mixed methodology. In other words, qualitative and quantitative methods may be necessary to gauge individual happiness in performance settings. As this is financially and time-consuming, there was not enough time nor money for completing such a task.

### *Implications*

Future research should inquire about the impact of the “performance” question (“With the exception of elementary or high school performances, did you go to a live music, theatre, or dance performance, in the last 12 months?) in the GSS on subjective well-being. That is, using the subset of questions (if R went to a dance, theater, and/or music performance) in totality instead of partially, like what was done for this study. Perhaps, in doing this, there will be more variation in what explains subjective well-being.

Another implication is what access to live performances looks like. As the results indicate, those who attended concerts in this study were more educated and reported more financial satisfaction. Due to financial satisfaction being my socioeconomic status (SES) indicator, those who report more satisfaction are more likely to be in higher SES than those who

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do not. Therefore, people in this category will be able to attend a concert because they have the means to do so. While there are a number of venues that do not charge a whole lot, or do not charge at all, these are scarce because they are usually held in the summers in some cities. This especially holds true when we talk about big-name artists.

It is also important to note that women were less likely to be White and attend a concert, according to the results found in Table 2. What this means is that concerts are White male dominated and, on average, Women of Color are more likely attend concerts. What can then be implied is that because White men have historically had more monetary capital, and Women of Color have recently gained more social and human capital, these kinds of capital allow these groups to mostly enjoy the benefits that go with them.

Finally, while it may seem like that class differences should not matter when attending concerts, my results showed otherwise. This is because, on the surface, it appears as though music acts as a unifier among people. When we add in the theory of collective effervescence, people should be united through music and concerts because of the feelings associated with listening and engaging to the event at hand. However, when we add in homophily, it makes sense that class differences do play a role in concert attendance. This means that people are more likely to attend concerts because they are more educated and have the financial means to do so. To reiterate, in short, we need to rethink about what access to concerts looks like.

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## APPENDIX

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of All Variables (N=1272)

Variables	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
Attended Music Performance	.22	.41
Happy	2.08	.68
Satisfied with Finances	1.99	.75
Education	13.49	2.96
Age	48.97	17.53
Women	.52	.50
White	.73	.44

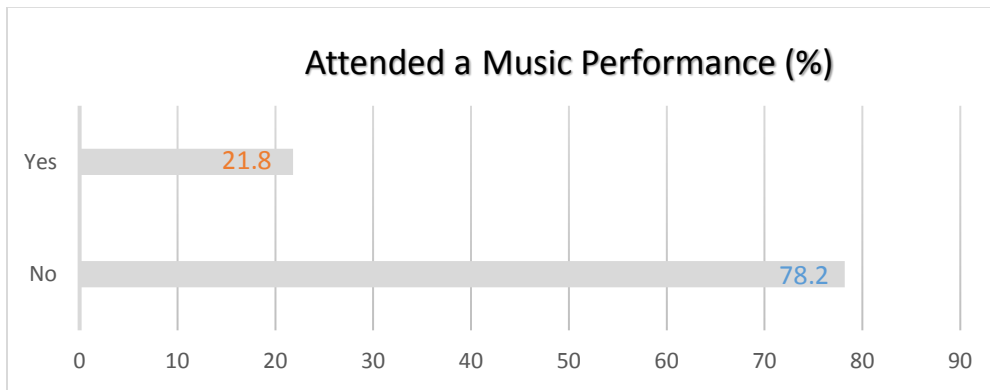


Figure 1. Percentage of Respondents Who Attended a Concert

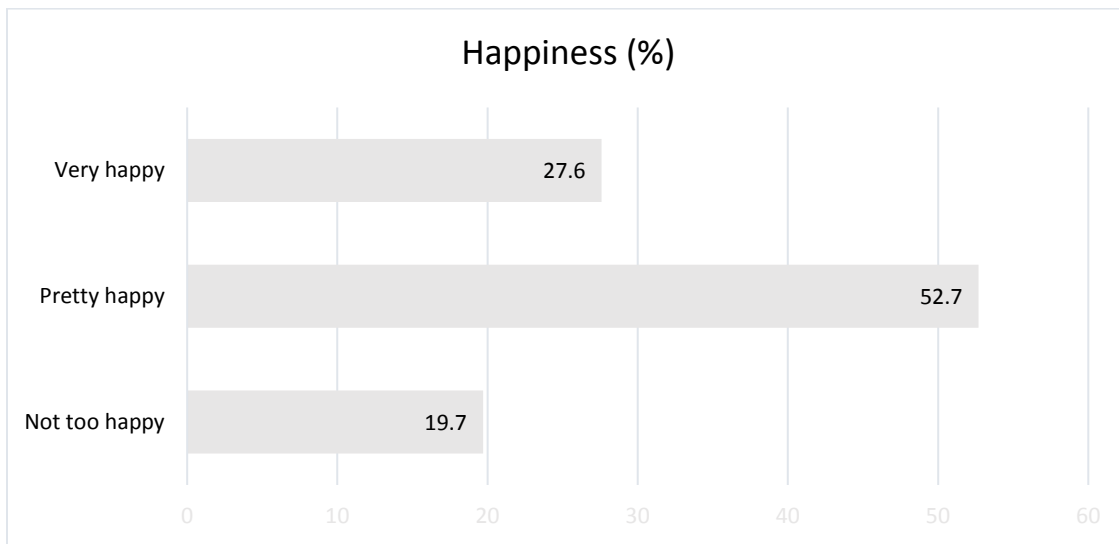


Figure 2. Percentage of R's Happiness



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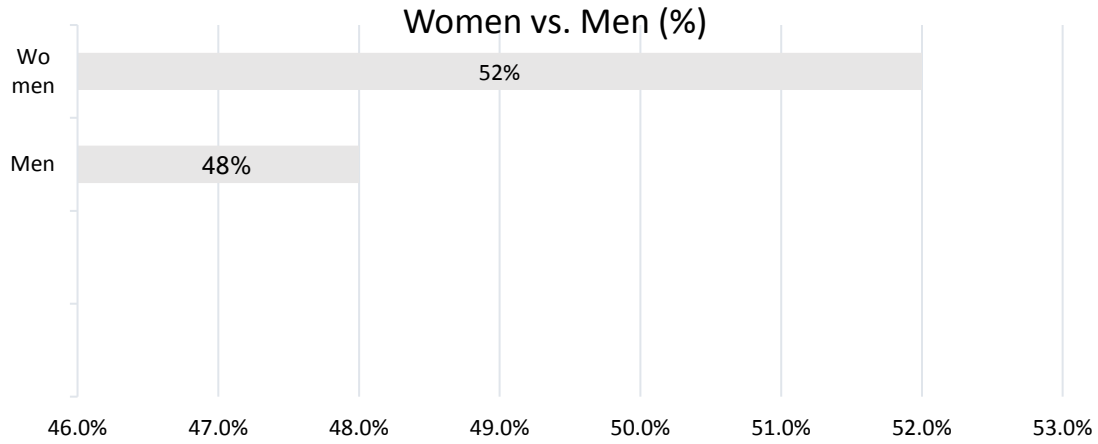


Figure 3. Percentage of Gender

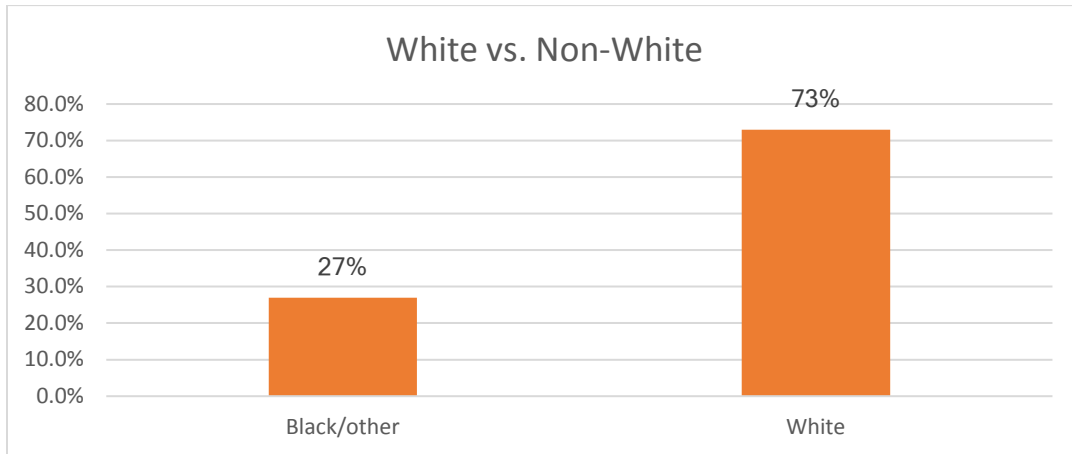
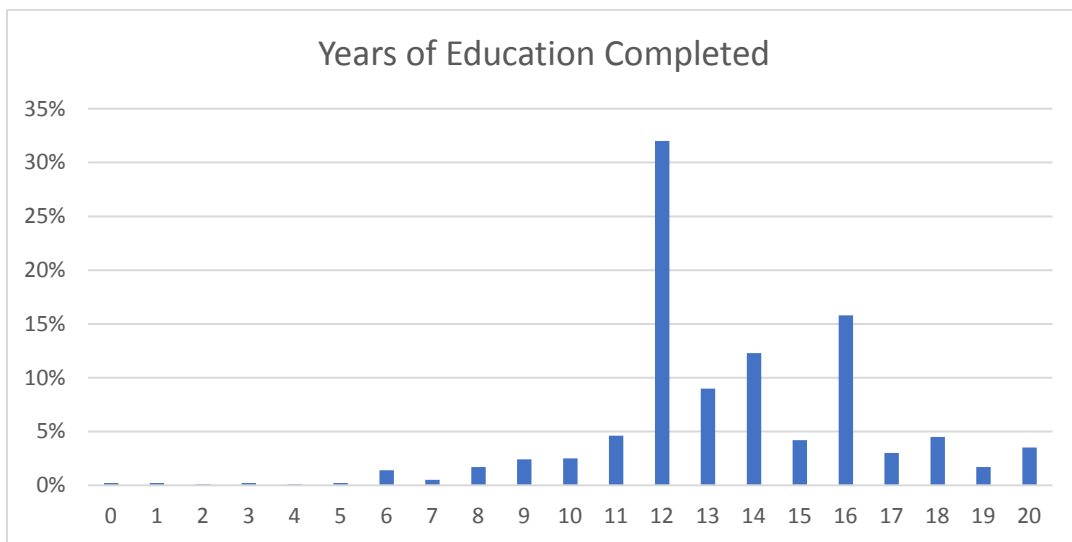


Figure 4. Percentage of Whites and Non-Whites



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Figure 5. Percentage of Completed Years of Education

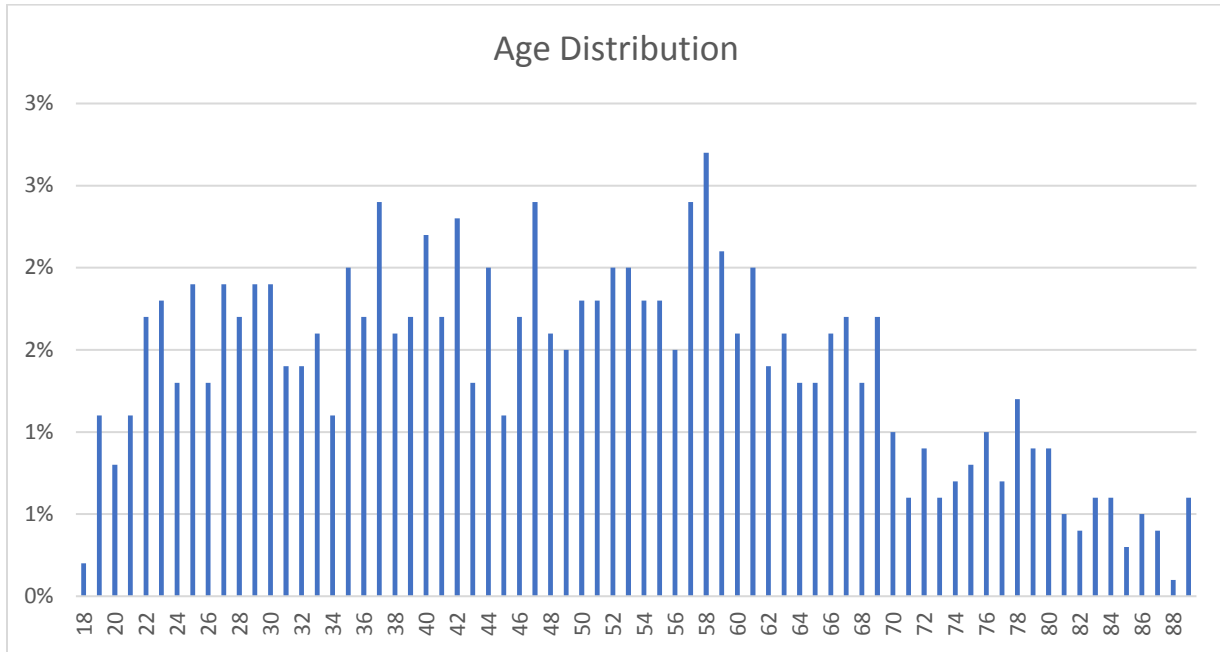


Figure 6. Age Distribution in Percent

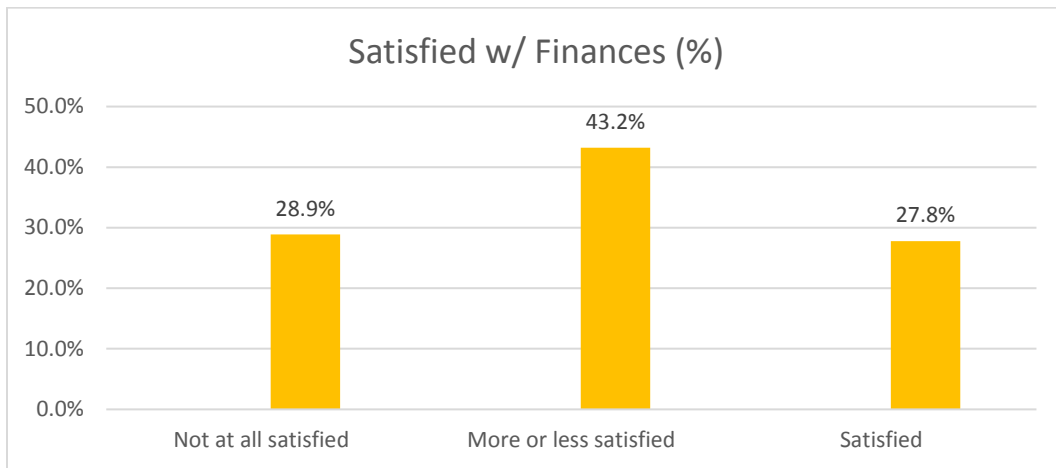


Figure 7. Percentage of Being Financially Satisfied

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Table 2. Correlations between Happiness and Six Variables (listwise deletion, two-tailed test, N=1272)

Variables	Attended Music Performance	Education	Women	White	Satisfied with Finances	Age
Happy	.045	.087*	-.060	.070	.302*	-.002
Attended Music Performance		.182*	-.039	.072	.073*	-.088*
Education			.014	.109*	.134*	-.039
Women				-.030	-.079*	.022
White					.149*	.177*
Satisfied with Finances						.111*

\* $p < .01$

Table 3. Regression of Happiness on All Variables

Variables	<i>b</i>	$\beta$
Attended Music Performance	.016	.010
Women	-.049	-.049
White	.041	.026
Satisfied with Finances	.266	.293**
Education	.010	.042**
Age	-.001	-.036
Constant	1.479	

$R^2 = .097$ ;  $F(6, 1271) = 22.630$ ;  $p < .01$

\*\* $p < .01$