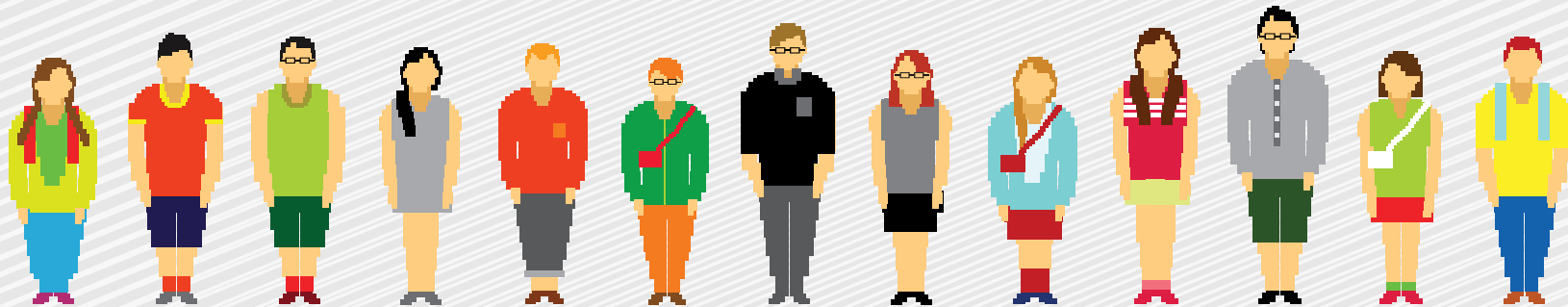


YOUTH

WHO WE SPOKE TO?

Respondents in this category consisted of 13 young people aged 18 to 26 years old, with arts and non-arts students from the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), Polytechnics, Universities and fresh graduates who have less than two years of working experience.



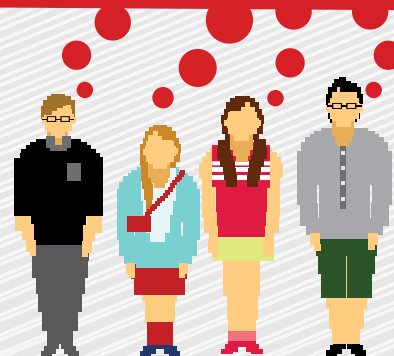
Please refer to Appendix B for a detailed list of respondents in this category.

THEIR PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE ARTS

YOUTHS HAVE A PRACTICAL APPROACH TOWARDS THE ARTS

Youths viewed the arts as activities hipsters¹, and those who were not able to excel in their academic studies, engage in. They cited examples of how the arts and humanities subjects were acknowledged by many as the 'back-up' or second choice option for students who did not qualify for the supposedly elite science stream.

In addition, there was a practical approach towards the arts – youths believed that the arts cannot provide one with a sustainable and comfortable lifestyle. The arts were associated with a starving artist – one who did what he or she loves but do not get paid a lot, hence only those who were well-off could afford to engage in the arts.



¹Defined as a person who follows the latest trends and fashions, especially those regarded as being outside the cultural mainstream by the Oxford English Dictionary.

“ Arts really depends on who you're asking. If you ask my friends they'll just say like the things hipsters do. The people who don't succeed... It's very popular in my secondary school, if you want to fail, choose arts. ”

Pearlin Teow, 18, SP Media and Communication Student

“ It's defined as people who do what they love but they don't get paid much. ”

Chrystal Hooi, 19, Singapore Polytechnic (SP) Media and Communication Student

“ I think most people in Singapore would define arts as something rich people do, or something you do as a hobby... but not something you can live off. ”

Navin Kumar, 26, Researcher

THE ARTS ARE A WAY FOR YOUTHS TO AFFIRM THEIR IDENTITIES

The theme of self-identity as a value of the arts was echoed by many respondents in this group. Through the arts, youths were able to find out more about themselves, grow their self-confidence and shape their identity in the process. The arts were also seen as an emotional outlet and a coping mechanism from the stresses of daily life.

Here are some of the respondents' stories of how the arts have helped to shape their identities:

“ The arts taught me to like myself. When you're a student and you're bad in math and science, you're doomed in Singapore. And it was very difficult to like what I am seeing about myself... It was very hard for me, I didn't know what I was good at...(the arts) taught me to accept what I cannot do but still do what I like. ”

Pearlin Teow, 18,
SP Media and
Communication Student

“ If you're talking about drums, it changed my life completely... If I didn't pick up the drum sticks...I don't know what I'll be doing now, maybe be an idiot or something. Like at least now I'm doing something with my life, like you know, something to look forward to. ”

Timothy Llyod Bracken,
21, waiting to enlist in
the National Service

“ Arts... is the only thing I'm keen to do, I love to do. Right now I'm just proving to my family and some of my friends that look down on me that I wanna do art so let me be, do my art, you know I wanna do something what I want. ”

Fatin Noor Haney Nur Hamis,19,
ITE Design and Visual Communications Student

“ I use music to isolate my emotions. When my family is having a quarrel; I just listen to extremely noisy music. It isolates me from everything else and stops everything so that I don't continue to quarrel...to me, it's more of emotional control. ”

Jason Teo, 22, National
University of Singapore
(NUS) Business Student

YOUTHS ASSOCIATE EXPRESSION, CREATIVITY AND EMPATHY WITH THE ARTS

Youths related the arts to the value of expression. It was a space for them to discover more about themselves. Other values that the youths associated the arts with were creativity and empathy, though in lesser degrees. While the respondents agreed that arts can teach us to be creative, creativity is not exclusive to those within the arts ecosystem. It is a value that is applicable to anyone in any industry.

EXPRESSION

“ I think in the arts (is) where you really find a lot of yourself and I think that helps to situate or put into a perspective what you're learning as well...the arts is really this space for you to explore...discover who you are...and also imagine other ways that Singapore could be or yourself could be. ”

Shawn Chua, 25,
Performance Artist,
Arts Researcher, Writer

“ Only time I had contact with art was during O Levels... I had to draw an oil canvas painting. I always find the art lessons very fun... There's no limit to what you want to draw. ”

Ryan Ng, 23,
NUS Banking and
Finance Student

“ Art has helped me think about the world, the society and things like that... I think without the arts, I will be a very different person. It has helped me think about who I am, what the world is, (and) about Singapore. ”

Navin Kumar,
26, Researcher

CREATIVITY

“ I think creativity is very important. I mean besides creativity being painting and dance...it helps us as a human to think out of the box and do things more efficiently and more effectively. ”

Sarah Nah, 25,
Fresh graduate

“ I think creativity can come from any person...need not be arts. In itself, arts will teach you how to think creatively....Whether we want to do so or not or whether we have had the experience to force us to think. ”

Navin Kumar,
26, Researcher

EMPATHY

“

...sometimes just reading a book, a character, you inhabit a completely different subject that's so alien to what you have experienced. So in a very direct way, comparing reading a book to a play forces you to inhabit the other ways of being.

”

Shawn Chua, 25,
Performance Artist,
Arts Researcher, Writer

BARRIERS TO THE ARTS

The youths identified two main barriers to being involved in the arts: the pragmatism of their parents and the social conditioning in society that drowned out their voices.

PRAGMATIC PRESSURES BY PARENTS

“ I guess if I was good in it (piano) then it'll be okay (if I said I wanted to be a pianist). But I don't think they (parents) will trust me. ”

Chrystal Hooi, 19, SP Media and Communication Student

“ Arts is like, when you got money then you do, when you no money, then just shut the f*** up. ”

Navin Kumar, 26, Researcher

Youths believed that their parents' pragmatic worldview have shaped their upbringing and attitudes. When it came to choosing what to do with their lives, the youths felt that their parents did not trust them to make the right decisions.

The youths perceived that their parents constantly worry about their future and careers. For respondents' whose parents were supportive of them being involved with the arts, they expressed that their parents showed apprehension that a career in the arts will not be financially sustainable. Instead, parents were supportive of art as an extra-curriculum activity but not as a career.

“ My dad is actually quite artistic...he draws a lot so I guess growing up, I was very much influenced by that and I used to draw and sketch quite a bit. But when I'm in secondary school, I wanted to do some more (arts), they were quite passive-aggressive about it. I think they see it as something that distracts me from academia. When, ironically actually, a lot of the work feeds my academic work. ”

Shawn Chua, 25, Performance Artist, Arts Researcher, Writer

“ When I first wanted to join visual communications at ITE, my parents won't allow me because they think: you won't be successful as a graphic designer. That's why they advised me not to take that course. ”

Annabelle Soh Yu Tin
18, ITE Central, Visual Communications

“ Mine was the opposite. My mom, she was very supportive. She gave me a decision to play music, dance, or paint. As I grow up painting more, dancing more, playing music, she was very supportive but at the back of her mind, she was also a bit worried. Like let's say if I really excel in it, will I be able to make a career out of it and if I do, will I be able to sustain myself in the near future. ”

Sarah Nah, 25,
Fresh graduate

“ For me, it's also about the sustainability part, and if you can't support yourself... But if you really like to do it, then you make sure you excel in it. ”

Ryan Ng, 23,
Banking and
Finance Student

“ My mom always says that there's only one champion, you'll never be the one. ”

Yvonne Yeo, 20, NUS
Business Student

“ I was from the Chinese Orchestra. I play the cello... My parents are quite happy about it. As long as I do well with my studies, they're okay with it. ”

Huang Yibin, 22,
Marketing Executive

SOCIETAL NORMS DROWNS OUT THEIR VOICES

Youths felt restricted by societal norms. These norms ranged from failure having no place in success-driven Singapore to acceptable careers defined as those which are stable and with high salaries such as a doctor or lawyer. All the respondents in this group felt pressured to comply with such beliefs.

“ In Singapore, I think when you are not in the top ten, even being average is a failure. ”

Chrystal Hooi, 19,
SP Media and
Communication Student

“ Some of my relatives (on) my dad's side mostly are nurses. All my aunties will (ask): Oh Fatin, what are you doing now? I say I'm doing design then they will (say): oh why you don't want to be a nurse. ”

Fatin Noor Haney Nur Hamis,
19, ITE Design and Visual
Communications Student

“ (They wanted me to be a)... doctor first. When I gave up the sciences, now they just feel that if I'm alive, they'll be relieved. I think they've given up...it was a long battle. ”

Shawn Chua, 25,
Performance Artist,
Arts Researcher, Writer

“ When you want to do arts, you must be in a place which...backs you up in the event you don't produce enough work. If you really do it in places like this then no problem, but for a country (Singapore) which is not conducive for (artists from the) middle class or low class, then you will have to be careful. I mean as much for passion also, you must be practical. Go the right place to do it. ”

Navin Kumar,
26, Researcher

HOW?

do we make Arts
more relevant in their lives

Respondents in the youth group were dictated by practical idealism when choosing what to do with their lives. They wanted to do what they are interested in but were restricted by pragmatism, since they felt that they were living in a success-driven society where their parents, peers and societal views mattered more than their own. Society has drowned their voices out and the youths needed more confidence in themselves to be who they wanted to be.

For the youths who were exposed to the arts, it was clear that the role of the arts was to help them to find their identities and express themselves. There is an opportunity for art to be the platform for youths to explore and share their identities with society.

What we could tell the youths:

THE ARTS GIVE YOU A CLEAR AND BALANCED VOICE.



Respondents in this group obtained their information from a mix of media sources. This included digital media such as social media (predominantly Facebook and Twitter), electronic direct mailers and websites. The music website, Bandwagon, was cited as an example. All respondents in this group were regular social media users. Word of mouth from friends, teachers and/or lecturers was also an important channel.

Traditional media such as newspapers and television had a limited reach to youths. Four respondents indicated they read The Straits Times, but only for selected sections such as Life! and Sports. Six respondents indicated they watched television but none of them watched Singapore's terrestrial television channels.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ARTS?

There was a mix of views from the respondents. Some believed that the people should be responsible for the arts themselves, while others believed that it should be the government or a shared responsibility between the government and the people.

“As it stands, pretty much most of our lives are dictated by the government. Therefore, it's the government's responsibility. But if eventually when the power is shifted... then it's everyone's responsibility.”

Navin Kumar,
26, Researcher

“I think it's the Singaporeans' responsibility...there's a whole vibrant community of underground musicians and Singaporeans (should) pay more attention to that (rather) than foreign music, like Bruno Mars.”

Timothy Llyod Bracken,
21, waiting to enlist in
the National Service

“Everybody need(s) to work together...the people need to be loud enough (and) the government notices that there is a voice that is rising...it's two-way.”

Pearlin Teow, 18, SP Media
and Communication Student