HWA CHONG INSTITUTION (HIGH SCHOOL SECTION)

PROJECT WORK WRITTEN REPORT 2021

<u>**Topic:**</u> Investigating the effects that Singaporean treatment and perspective of the creative arts has on artists' identity.

<u>**Slant:**</u> Geography/Social Science

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<u>**Declaration**</u>

We declare that this assignment is our own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which we are willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 General Background

In Singapore, the creative arts have generally taken a back seat to sectors such as science and technology that are seen as central to Singapore's economic strategy (Koh, 2018). As a result, the creative arts, including the visual arts, literary arts and performing arts, has been a profession in Singapore that has been undervalued. However, as the Singaporean government looks to increase support for the arts to establish a distinct Singaporean identity (Lee, 2017), how has the government's policies, solutions and perspectives, along with evolving societal perspectives, affected local artists' identity? In this paper, Singaporeans refer to key stakeholders like society and the government while Artists refer to both youths who study art and professional artists.

The idea of the government supporting the arts substantially was first proposed by Ong Teng Cheong in the *Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts* (1989), followed by the *Renaissance City Report* (2000) proposed by the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA). A large part of support for the arts comes in the form of comprehensive funding that covers a wide range of needs. There are many grants that artists can apply for such as the Seed grant for non-profit arts organisations and the Arts fund (National Arts Council, 2021). Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Singaporean government committed $75 million to The Arts and Culture Resilience Package to aid in the recovery of the arts scene (Co, 2021), while the British government has proposed a 50% cut funding on arts subjects in university (Bakare & Adams, 2021), and the New York City Budget cut arts spending by 11% (Jacobs, 2020), thus showing the Singaporean government's commitment to the arts.

In spite of the intensive efforts of the Singaporean government to support the growth of the arts, these investments have yet to meet the goal of establishing Singapore as a global arts city with the arts providing a cultural ballast for nation building (National Arts Council, 2000). Some raise the issue of Singaporeans retaining largely traditional beliefs which limit the thematic material available for local artists to explore. Others raise the inorganic nature of the arts scene's development due to heavy government involvement. Lastly, the expansive investments exist with a major trade-off: censorship. Many artists have reported withdrawal of government funding even after careful consideration of the content of their works ("NAC withdraws grant", 2015;

Harmon, 2017). As artists need to rely on these grants to sustain themselves, they find themselves restricted by these guidelines and regulations.

In conclusion, government policies have proven to be ineffective in creating a flourishing arts scene, and even restrict the creativity of artists. Knowing many who are convinced that art is not a realistic career option and reading about many artists who feel restricted by government policies, it is especially important to investigate how these government policies can affect their identity and ego formation, in order to shed some light on how effective these policies have been and how they can be improved.

1.2 Rationale

This study looks at the impact of Singaporean perception and treatment of the arts on the identity of both professional and student artists. In Singapore, artists lack an appreciative audience, and are unable to support themselves financially without taking up other jobs (Elangovan, 2019). This affects artists in two stages of psychosocial development as identified by Erikson (1980): Generativity vs Stagnation, when there is a lack of value for professional artists' artworks, and Identity vs Role Confusion when youth are discouraged from pursuing the arts. This paper thus explores the impact of Singaporean perspectives and treatment on an artists' social identity and his or her work through the combination of social identity theory and dramaturgical analysis.

1.3 Research Questions
   1. What unique factors affect the identity of artists in Singapore?
   2. To what extent has treatment and perspective of the arts in Singapore contributed to or created these factors?

1.4 Thesis Statement

In general, artists have less developed psychosocial identities and experience identity conflict due to the limiting nature of government policies, measures and social boundaries. This is especially true for student artists, as the presence of social pressure to stay away from the arts in Singapore, coupled with poor education and promotion of the arts results in student artists experiencing role confusion.

1.5 Scope of Research/Delimitations

This paper will focus on significant aspects of government support, such as monetary subsidies and arts education, and societal perspective of the arts. The focus is solely on the perceptions and identity formation of artists, including both student and professional artists. In this study, student artists refer to those who study the arts in a formal school setting locally, limited to those in the AEP, MEP and SOTA, while professional artists refer to those who have published art or sell art for a living, such as authors and theatre practitioners. This paper will focus on how these art students are affected by and interpret the treatment and perceptions of the arts by Singaporeans and not mainly Singaporeans' perceptions of the arts from the perspective of Singaporeans.

1.6 Significance of Research

This study can act as a springboard for further investigation on how the Singaporean government can further improve upon existing measures and policies to accomplish the goal of establishing Singapore as a global arts city. This study hopes to make a strong case as to why the arts scene, and especially arts education, has been restricted and how it can be better supported. Additionally, this study looks to fill a gap in the existing literature by studying the psychosocial impacts of a lacklustre art scene on people who create art.

1.7 Limitations

This study is limited by the sample size of interviews being carried out. There could be difficulty in finding professional artists to agree to an interview or survey. Additionally, the scope of this research is limited to professional artists and art students only, and does not cover the impact of government policy and measures on consumers of the arts, or the arts as part of the economy. This study is also not able to cover all disciplines in art, and thus may not be representative of every perspective in the arts scene.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section looks at the two main elements of this research topic: The Singaporean Government's perspective and treatment of the arts, and identity formation theories.

Government Perspective of the Arts

In Singapore, the government plays a large role in sustaining and developing the arts scene through funding and organising art events, and up to 85% of Singapore's art is funded by the state (Bowie, 2018). Considering such heavy government involvement, it is imperative to investigate the Singaporean government's perspective and treatment of the arts.

Problems with government support

Strong infrastructural development has been the bedrock of Singapore's growth, and while such active support for the arts scene is applaudable, the provision of physical space and materials alone is not enough to foster a creative and vibrant arts scene. Government support has thus fallen short due to a difference in motivation between the government and artists. These differences mainly fall into two areas.

Firstly, striking a balance between the government's interest in both promoting the arts and culture and maintaining the social-political status quo of soft authoritarianism proves a challenge for the government (Ooi, 2010). Singapore's model of soft authoritarianism is communitarian, and prioritises social and national interest along with preservation of core cultural values (Roy, 1994). As a result, this causes the Singapore government to strongly support the production of arts, yet strictly limit the content, style and themes allowed, most notably, a restriction on portraying political issues, homosexuality and religion, thus severely limiting the creative freedom of artists.

Secondly, there is a gap between rationale for government support in the arts and artists' motivation for producing arts. The government tends to be overly focused on the arts as an avenue for nation building, resulting in the arts being cloaked in utilitarianism (Chong, 2017). The pragmatic perspective of the government can stall the development of the arts, as aspects of an arts scene such as creativity and public engagement, cannot be improved purely through monetary support. On the other hand, artists, being unique individuals, have different views on

controversial matters, and thus wish to express themselves through art. In spite of the poor pay, artists are fueled by their passion to make sacrifices for their art. Yet, due to the government's more utilitarian view, artists find themselves severely limited by the government.

It must be acknowledged, however, that rationale behind supporting the arts have been shifting since the Renaissance City Master Plan (2000). The government has shifted its focus to acknowledging alternative forms of success and establishing Singapore as an art hub. These renewed goals are particularly promising for the future of government involvement in the arts. More can still be done, as this government-led cultural development envisions a vibrant arts scene as market-driven, decorative and non-disruptive (Chua, 2008 as cited in Luger & Ren, 2017), which serves to demonstrate the gap that remains in motivations between the government and artists in spite of continued efforts to support the arts scene.

Art Education in Singapore

As mentioned earlier, provision of physical space is not enough to foster a creative and vibrant art scene. The need to educate and nurture the sensibilities, skills and culture required for the arts to flourish is important. (Ministry of National Development, 2013) However, upon close inspection of the arts education in Singapore, it can be concluded that not enough has been done to solve the problem at its root: a lack of appreciation and engagement.

There are three tracks for aspiring artists in Singapore: the Arts Elective Programme (AEP), Music Elective Programme (MEP) and the School of the Arts (SOTA).

AEP

The AEP was introduced by the MOE to selected secondary schools in 1984. The MOE channelled resources more generously to the AEP, including better-trained teachers, smaller classes and material resources, in an effort to cater to the artistic aptitude to a smaller group of students. Yet, in the AEP, students are still unable to escape learning, with great emphasis placed on a "formal" and "prescriptive teaching style" (Hickman, 1990). This predilection for the acquisition and exercise of technical skills as a measure of aesthetic ability can be traced back to the ancient Asian traditions of crafts training, with a "craftsman-apprentice" model (O'Shea, 1999).

<u>MEP</u>

The MEP is a 4 year programme designed for musically inclined students, aiming to develop students as practitioners, scholars, advocates and leaders in music and the arts (MOE, 2020). The MEP is only available at selected secondary schools and requires strict musical and academic prerequisites. Chan J.K, Director of Curriculum Planning and Development at the Ministry of Education (2013) has explained that the Music Elective Programme was created for students who could cope with the "conceptual and analytical faculties in the subject". This type of limitation and stereotypes might deprive students who are academically weaker but musically talented from exploring their passions further.

<u>SOTA</u>

SOTA is the only secondary school in Singapore to offer a dedicated art programme. However, the focus in SOTA seems to remain on chasing academic excellence instead of developing students' artistic capabilities. A manifestation of this struggle between academic and artistic focus caused many teachers to leave the school, with some citing a disconnect between educators and management on how the arts should be taught. As a result, fewer than three in ten SOTA graduating students go on to pursue arts-related university courses (Yuen, 2017). This shows the persistent issues in both arts education and societal perspectives of the arts, resulting in many students being dissuaded from pursuing arts careers.

<u>Societal Perspectives</u>

Perhaps due to a poor arts education, interest in the arts have decreased, with only 29% of respondents interested in the arts, a sharp decrease from 37% in 2017 and the lowest percentage since 2008 (National Arts Council, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed the underappreciation of artists in Singapore, as 71% of 1000 respondents voted for "artist" being a non-essential occupation ("Essential or not", 2020). Some raise the fact that this survey was conducted in the midst of the pandemic, which could have inflated the results (Koh, 2020). However, this survey still serves as evidence of how societal valuation has a significant impact on the artist themselves, as many artists have shared their frustrations and defended their occupation through social media (Basbas, 2020).

Identity Theories

The second section of this literature review thus serves to utilise certain identity theories to investigate the impacts of government and societal perspectives as explained in the first section.
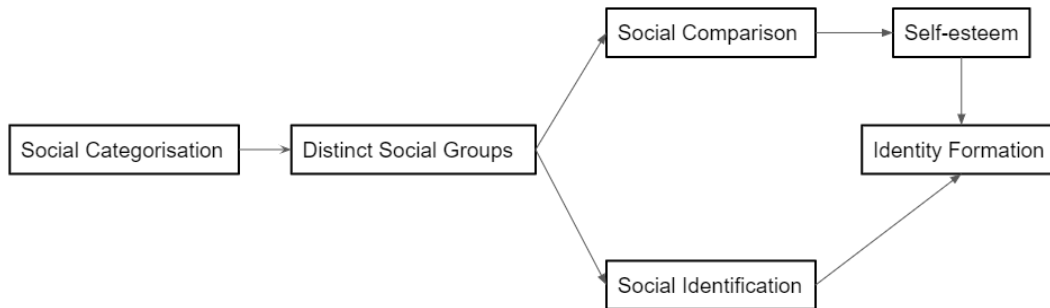
Social Identity Theory

Fig. 1: Social Identity Theory

The concept of Social Identity Theory was first pioneered by Tajfel and Turner (1979). They proposed that part of one's definition of self is influenced and supplemented by the social groups that one belongs to. Tajfel and Turner further categorise the mental processes involved in forming groups into three main stages: categorisation, identification and comparison. During the process of categorisation, people categorise themselves into different social groups, such as Singaporean, student and artist. Social identification means adopting the identity of the particular groups one is a part of. This causes one's actions and thoughts to be influenced, thus implicating the way they view other individuals or groups (Ellemers, 2020). The last stage, social comparison, refers to a person's tendency to compare his or her group to other groups, and self-esteem is maintained by comparing favourably to other groups (McLeod, 2019).

Application of Social Identity Theory

The stage of Social Comparison and its contribution to self-esteem is perhaps the most important when considering the effects of societal perspectives and government. For example, artists are frequently pitted against their STEM counterparts due to societal perceptions in Singapore.

However, in Singapore, the STEM-related fields are frequently affirmed and viewed by both society and familial figures as more essential than artists. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in a 2015 speech, identified STEM capabilities as essential in ensuring Singapore's growth for the next 50 years (Chang, 2018). On the other hand, those who pursue arts careers have been ridiculed for being too idealistic. For example, performer and music composer Amni Musfirah, age 24, revealed that "many people outside of the School of the Arts outside of Sota thought we couldn't succeed because we were just doing 'arts' and had 'no brains'" (Elangovan, 2019). This can result in a low self esteem for artists, as it is glaringly obvious that artists are valued much less than other groups such as those in STEM fields.
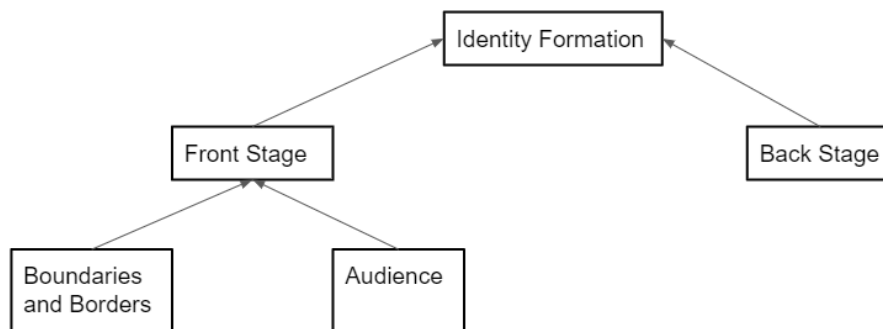
Dramaturgical Analysis

Fig 2. Dramaturgical Analysis

The concept of dramaturgical analysis likens the world to a stage and all the people in the world, merely actors. The theory was first presented by Goffman (1956) in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, and posits that one's social identity is not a stable and independent identity, but rather is remade under different settings and situations to project a certain appearance or definition of the situation (Goffman, 1956, p. 2-3). The most applicable aspect of this theory to professional artists is Goffman's identification of regions and regional behaviour (Goffman, 1956, p. 66). There are two main regions this paper is concerned with: the front region and the back region. The front region, or front stage, refers to the place where a performance is given, and can be seen as an effort to give the appearance that one maintains the standards of the region (Goffman, 1956, p. 67). Within the front region, the performance is affected by the audience present, and based on social scripts shaped by cultural norms and boundaries. The back region, or back stage, refers to the place where the impression fostered is

knowingly contradicted (Goffman, 1956, p. 69), or where people can reflect their "true" selves (Cole, 2019).

<u>Application of Dramaturgical Analysis</u>

Thus, the social identity of artists are most affected when performing in the public stage, as they constantly face standards of decorum which are enforced by sanctions or sanctioners, i.e. the society or the government. Traditional beliefs and government regulations both serve to form boundaries and set standards that artists have to follow in order to maintain a public image in lieu with societal scripts of behaviour. Furthermore, artists, who experience stigma with regards to the standard of their works and their profession being non-essential, impractical and undesirable, face enhanced pressure of idealised conduct from society (Goffman, 1963 as cited in Barnhart, n.d.).
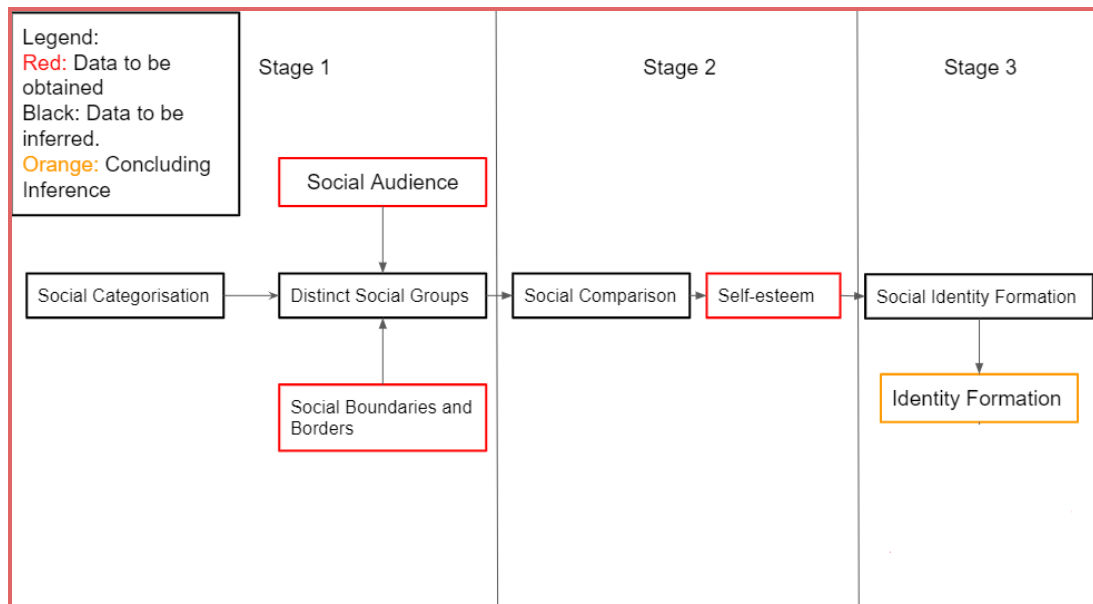
Combined framework for Analysis

Fig 3. Combined Model for Analysis

Figure 3, which is shown above, thus serves to combine both models. Dramaturgical Analysis can be said to have an influence on the "Distinct Social Group" stage in Social Identity Theory, namely its impact on "Social Boundaries" and "Social Audience". The marriage of these two models helps this research to more comprehensively cover the multitude of factors that influence artist identity, such as artists finding the need to change their identity due to government policy which contributes to the point of "Social Audience", and the social stigma that

the arts is an undesirable career in Singapore, which contributes to the point of "Social Comparison".

Chapter 3: Methodology

This paper looks at identity formation of artists through two phases: a survey and an interview.

Phase 1 involves a questionnaire survey to investigate the factors highlighted in red in Figure 3, which are factors that can be obtained directly from art students. The questionnaire survey will be able to measure a wide range of unobservable data such as their beliefs and traits, which is important when investigating the impact that "Social Audience" and "Social boundaries and borders" on themselves and their "Self-esteem" (Cherry, 2019; Bhattacherjee, 2012). The survey will be sent through social media and other messaging platforms. In an attempt to diversify student backgrounds, the survey form will be spread through contacts in other schools with more diverse student populations.

Phase 2 involves interviewing professional artists who have experience in navigating the art ecosystem in Singapore. Through this, this study hopes to identify challenges faced in their career with regards to Singaporean perspectives and treatment of the arts, especially the impact that government policies have on them and their work. The interviews will be recorded through Zoom with consent from the interviewees. Afterwards, the interviews will be transcripted and compared to observe common themes that may emerge. When analysing the transcripts, a deductive approach will be used in order to point out key themes related to the research questions and test the framework and theories raised in Chapter 2. This would involve mapping connections in the data collected to the predetermined framework of analysis as shown in Figure 3.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis

In this chapter, the results of the survey distributed to 21 students currently studying art in the formal school curriculum as well as the results of the interviews conducted with 3 artists will be presented and analysed.

Phase 1

Social Audiences

Who do you mainly create art for?
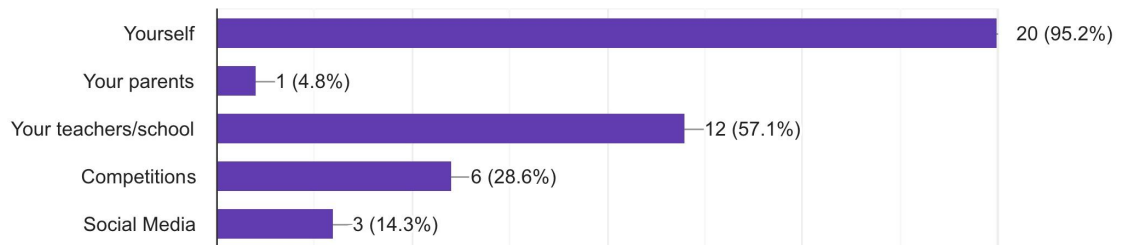
21 responses

Fig. 4

This section will focus on the questions in our survey regarding social audiences. From Fig. 4, it can be observed that almost all students surveyed created art for their own enjoyment. However, most of them also created art for either their schools, or for competitions.

Social Boundaries and Limitations

This section will focus on the questions in our survey regarding social boundaries and limitations. Students generally felt that when creating art for their personal entertainment, their art making process could be very free and without any limitations at all, with 95.2% of them feeling this way. When creating art for school or their teachers, students generally felt that they were slightly more restricted in the creative process and the content of their art, although there was still space and opportunity to experiment with their artworks.

One student shared that when creating art for formal competitions, he felt quite restricted, citing the criterion of competitions and the out-of-bounds markers as reasons. A student shared that "there are some OB markers that are like kind of unspoken rules and it's a bit restrictive." These

"OB markers" refer to out-of-bounds markers, which are not a defined set of rules, and evolve with Singapore's socio-political context (Tan, 2002). Some OB markers cited by the student include "religion or sexuality".

Another student shared that there were sufficient "opportunities to share artworks in school or through competitions or social media." These opportunities for art students to share their artworks could thus help to make the art scene for youths less restrictive by giving them more platforms to create artworks and more choices of what type of art these students would want to create to submit to competitions or post on social media. However, some students also shared that the fact that their artworks would be graded was also in a sense, restrictive. In general, 90.5% of students felt that there were too many boundaries and restrictions when creating art in Singapore.

Apart from these systemic and technical social boundaries and limitations, there also seems to exist an unspoken rule regarding certain topics in the artistic community either because these topics are considered controversial or extremely sensitive. This is notable as it suggests that these boundaries regarding taboo topics are not explicitly clear to student artists and they may fear to explore these topics, or may unwittingly pass these boundaries, resulting in negative feedback from the school or the public which may be highly discouraging to the student. Thus, in addition to the existing censorship of certain taboo topics by schools and competitions, students may feel compelled to self-censor, amplifying the actual social limitations imposed upon them, resulting in a lack of self-esteem.

Social Comparison

How do you feel Singapore values art in comparison to the sciences?

21 responses

● Art more than Science
● Art equal to Science
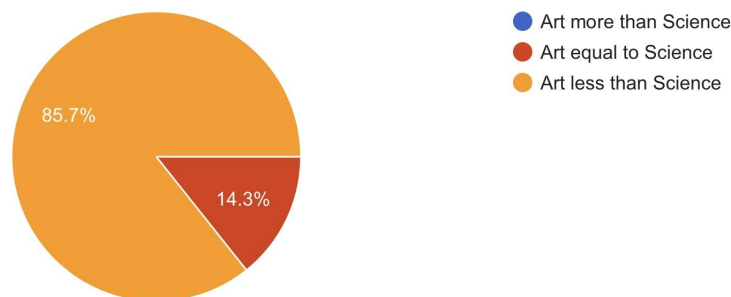● Art less than Science

85.7%

14.3%

Fig. 5

This section will focus on the questions in our survey regarding social comparison. Looking at Fig. 5, we can see that 85.7% of students believe that Singapore values the sciences more than the arts. As mentioned in this paper, (Chapter 1.1), Singapore traditionally views the sciences as a more profitable and productive career option and statistically, those who study the sciences have a higher chance of securing a job than those who study the arts (Baharudin, 2021), which should lead to a lower self-esteem due to how these students perceive themselves as valued less in comparison to students who study the sciences.

14.3% of students however, felt that Singapore values the arts as much as it values the sciences. This could be due to the Singaporean government's inclination to begin a gradual shift in focus from the sciences to the humanities (Chan, 2021). Although this trend is not confirmed, it does show that artists may not be that drastically affected by the social comparison of how Singaporeans view the sciences and how they view the arts.

To what extent do you feel that an arts career is discouraged in Singapore?
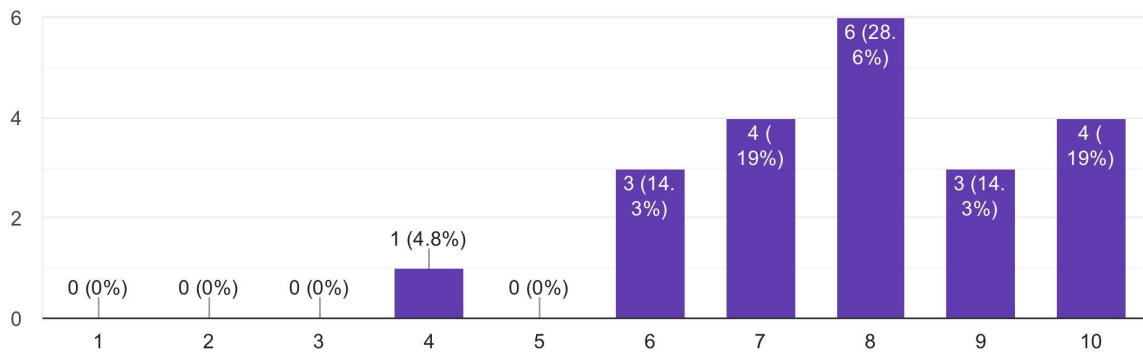
21 responses

Fig. 6

Similar to the data obtained from Fig. 5, although Fig. 6 shows that 4.8% of students feel that an arts career is not entirely discouraged in Singapore, a vast majority of students still feel social pressure to stay away from the arts, as they feel that an arts career is discouraged in Singapore.

The fact that most arts students feel social pressure to stay away from the arts would, in our hypothesis, lead to a lower sense of self-esteem and lead to students shying away from their true passions to pursue a career that is generally more accepted by society.

Self-Esteem

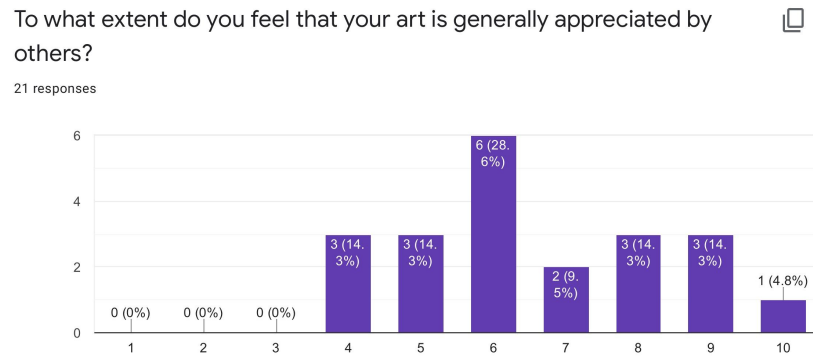To what extent do you feel that your art is generally appreciated by others?

21 responses

Fig. 7

This section will focus on the questions in our survey regarding self-esteem. This section is the most important as according to our cross-sectional model, one's self-esteem is the main factor determining one's social identity. If one has a high self-esteem, one would be proud of their own performances and feel that they are good and worthy because others view them positively. This would lead to a more stable sense of self and thus a more stable social identity. (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995）

As we can see from Fig.7, most students feel that their art is sufficiently appreciated by others, which seemingly contradicts our expectation that students' self-esteem would decrease due to social-comparison. However, the results obtained from Fig.7 reflect the students' self-esteem regarding their artwork at the point in their lives where it is one of the subjects they study in school. Thus, schools do generally give students enough opportunities to share their artwork and feel like their artwork is appreciated. However, the trend shown from Fig.5 and Fig.6 show that art students feel Singaporean society generally does not value the arts very much.

Phase 2- Interview

This section covers the results and analysis of the interviews conducted. Introduction of the interviewees can be found in appendix 1.

Social Audience/Boundaries

In the context of professional artists, social audience and boundaries refer to the audience an artist performs for, and the subsequent boundaries that are set by these audiences. For artists in Singapore, social audiences would include the government, whose grants are essential in funding their works, and the public, who would make up most of the ticket fees.

Government-set boundaries

In Singapore, government set boundaries are a looming spectre for artists looking to explore topics perceived as slightly more sensitive. Miriam shares that she had "always wanted to write something about [her] relationship with religion, and [her] relationship with sexuality", but was never able to do so, as it is "very very hard to get funding [for these plays]". This shows how these boundaries can limit creative freedom, especially in Singapore, where funding for performances is heavily reliant on government grants. Dominic also recounted the challenges 2Bco faced with the NAC and censorship while producing their adaptation of Robert Yeo's *"The Singapore Trilogy"*. Even though they had "stressed that the play was non-partisan", their submission for a grant was rejected by the NAC even though Yeo's plays were "fairly prominent". The only reason they received was that "competition [for the grant] was too strong". When pressed further, the NAC replied that they could not reveal why it was rejected. Thankfully, 2Bco eventually received funding from the Arts Fund, which was predominantly controlled by the TOTE Board. Although the true reason for its rejection is unknown, this shows the challenge of applying for grants in Singapore, and is part of a larger difficulty that many artists face- having to seriously consider the probabilities of receiving a grant when creating art.

On the other hand, Eric believes that there are restrictions set by the government, but those come in the form of self-censorship, as "outright censorship is not really a problem for the literary arts". Instead, it is the artists themselves who have to be "very mindful of the boundaries within which [they] work". This constant pressure on the artist to conscientiously proofread their own works for sensitive topics can take a toll on their spirit, and clearly limit their artistic freedom. Furthermore, the obscure and blurry markers for ratings given by IMDA can cause even more problems for artists. Miriam shares with us that non-heterosexual works "usually get

an IMDA18 rating", even if there is no "sexually explicit content", yet "excessive swearing, nudity and sexual content is fine, as long as it is within the heterosexual realm". Hence, artists are left guessing as to what projects will be accepted for funding, and if accepted, what rating will their projects be given. Having to grapple with the unclear definitions further place artists who produce their own works in a state of constant worry.

Why artists are unable to break the boundaries

In theory, these boundaries could be avoided if artists had the financial backing to give them greater flexibility. However, artists in Singapore are reliant on these audiences as their main source of revenue, and hence find it near impossible to break the boundaries imposed on them. Dominic shares that an alternative source of income which is "much more common in other countries", private donations, are "not very prominent at the moment", and "smaller, independent groups are very unlikely to get this (private donations)". Furthermore, Miriam explains that "many young actors don't get to choose to turn down low paying jobs", as it would leave a gap in their Curriculum Vitae. In summary, Eric suggests that "[artists] would like to maintain smooth relations with our patrons" and thus have to "do a double take sometimes with everything we do".

Social Comparison

Financial Worries

In the same vein, the reliance of artists on grants and government funding does have an impact on the aspect of social comparison. Social comparison, which is a part of social identity theory, directly correlates with a person's self-esteem. In Singapore, a pragmatic society, pay can become a measure of value and success. An OCBC survey showed that less than half of survey respondents will consider being a freelancer in the gig economy, while 83% want to secure a job with regular income (Choo, 2019). However, Dominic shares with us that as an artist, "draw[ing] regular salary as a full time staff is quite rare" and freelance artists have to take on a "whole bunch of different part time gigs", which highlights the instability and lack of financial security for artists. To illustrate the point, all of the interviewees rely on having day jobs to supplement their income. Dominic is a research assistant at National Institute of Education, Eric is an English teacher at the National University of Singapore, while Miriam teaches and does enrichment seminars on the side. Compared to jobs in other fields such as STEM, the low value of arts in

Singapore can hence be seen. These financial worries also bleed into other areas of their creative process. Miriam summarises the feelings of many artists perfectly, that "it can be very deflating in the sense that you lose a lot of time to incubate your creative works, because you're so busy working three other teaching jobs".

<u>Poor Social Valuation</u>

Artists also face a large amount of social pressure. Eric, Dominic and Miriam all share that there is social pressure and stigma against the arts. As written in this paper earlier, the survey regarding artists being the number one most non-essential job did spark a large reaction within the community. Dominic expresses that this is "rightfully so, because [artists] are almost always on the defensive". Eric also shared a story about his colleague who's daughter is entering an art school in France. When asked about his daughter by another colleague, he said "excuse me, my daughter is not smart enough to be in the sciences". Having to constantly justify one's choices in life in order to pursue one's dream or passion can be draining for these artists, and constant pressure on them to prove themselves can take a toll on their social identity and self esteem. Dominic honestly shares that "the pressure is always present, whether it's from people you know, or people you don't know".

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As the focus of nation building in Singapore shifts to a shared identity created by the arts, it is important to provide an honest perspective of how government and social perspectives have impacted both professional and student artists.

For art students, this study has concluded that the main factors influencing their identity formation are censorship and out-of-bounds markers as well as the specific criteria that their artworks are judged by schools and competitions. It can also be concluded that the way schools treat students as well as the opportunities that competitions create for art students are sufficient in allowing them to be satisfied with their identity of being an art student. However, due to the greater societal and financial pressures, there are some differences in the identity formation of a professional artist compared to an art student.

The professional artists' identity and work is, in general, negatively affected by government policies and social perspectives. The heavy reliance on government grants has resulted in the restriction of creative freedom due to censorship. Social pressures and low valuation of the worth of artists can lead to low self-esteem for artists as a social group. Having to work multiple day jobs also takes time away from creative pursuits, and has an impact on the final product.

In conclusion, the findings of this paper revealed a disparity between learning the arts in school and the reality of being an artist in society. Schools are generally a place for students to learn from mistakes and develop their talents, while in society, the arts are generally perceived to be of low social value. This results in art students being discouraged from becoming an artist when they grow up, causing them to eventually lose self-esteem in their identity as an art student as they grow older, experiencing role confusion. Professional artists face major challenges in building a sustainable arts culture. In general, more can be done to improve the social value and artistic freedom of artists to benefit Singapore's art scene in the future.

Appendix I

Interviewees

Dominic Nah is the dramaturg for the Second Breakfast Company (2BCo). His dramaturg credits include *"The Moon Is Less Bright"* by The Second Breakfast Company and *"Alice, Bob & Eve"* with RAW Moves, amongst others. He has also been invited by Asian Dramaturgs' Network (ADN) to work as a rapporteur at the ADN Lab in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2018 and several other workshops.

Miriam Cheong is a playwright and actress who made her professional playwriting debut in her play *"The Other F Word",* staged from 24-28 March 2021, which examines her relationship with her body, the body positivity movement and the people around her as she navigates the ups and downs of weight loss. Her other works include her autobiographical piece *"The Chronicles of Xiaoming"* and the spin-off *"*晚安你好*: The Late night show with Xiao Ming"*.

Eric Francis Tinsay Valles is a director of the Poetry Festival (Singapore). His first poetry book, *"A World in Transit"*, was published in 2011, and his works have been featured in a wide array of other publications. He was nominated for the Singapore Literature Prize and won a Goh Sin Tub Creative Writing prize for poems in his second collection, *"After the Fall (dirges among ruins)"*.

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