

The Next Generation of Voters

Young middle Australians talk
Arts, Culture and Creativity

A New Approach
(ANA)

Acknowledgments

About ANA

A New Approach (ANA) is Australia's first think tank dedicated to arts, culture and creativity, and was established in 2018. ANA's vision is for an Australia that celebrates, benefits from and invests in arts, culture and creativity for all Australians.

ANA's work informs debate, shifts beliefs and inspires better public policy. We leverage our unique independence and expertise to generate the evidence-led insights that underpin our contemporary, pragmatic and non-partisan advice.

ANA acknowledges the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and their continuing cultural and creative practices in this land.

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About this report

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The *Insight* series

This paper is the sixth in ANA's *Insight* series. Our Insight Reports provide a deep dive into research and analysis of a particular arts and cultural policy topic or other area of interest.

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Executive Summary

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This report provides current insights into the attitudes and beliefs held by 'young middle Australians' towards arts and cultural engagement and the role it plays in their lives. It includes the findings of a national focus group study of 18-29-year-old 'undecided voters' from lower- and middle-income families, predominantly living in outer suburbs, regional areas and federal marginal electorates. We spoke with young people from every state and territory in Australia in the period April to June 2021.

How ANA defines 'middle Australians'

- swing or undecided voters
- from low and middle income households
- living in regional or outer suburban locations

ANA's interest in young middle Australians stems from the role they will play in shaping our culture and the national political discourse over the coming decades. As Australia ages, this cohort will become one of the most influential voting groups and will occupy a key demographic for decades to come. Currently, a disproportionately high number of Australians in this age group are undecided or unaligned swing voters.

During 21 focus groups, 84 young middle Australians from every state and territory in Australia gave us their perspectives and perceptions on the following core questions:

- What *is* 'arts and culture'?
- What is *Australian* arts and culture?
- What is the value of arts and culture *to society*?
- What is the value of arts and culture *to them, personally*?
- How do the cultural and creative industries *work*?

In a nutshell – young middle Australians view arts and cultural experiences as being woven into the very fabric of everyday life. They don't associate arts and culture with elitism – they see it as integral to a full and rounded life. As such, arts and culture will play an increasingly critical role in shaping our nation's future direction, as the arts and culture that young Australians so enthusiastically engage with will have a pervasive influence on how they think and behave. This will, in turn, inform both the opportunities and preferences of many Australians in the coming decade.

Young middle Australians have told us that arts and culture is embedded in every aspect of their lives, every day, in almost every kind of activity. They value arts and cultural engagement because it:

- helps them express themselves
- helps them connect with others, both alike and different from them
- makes them feel inspired
- helps them learn new things and think differently about the things they already know.

Engaging with arts and culture is not the only means they use to get those needs met – but it's most assuredly one of their favourites. They connected it to their enjoyment of sport, their choices of fashion or interior design, their leisure time and their attendance to their mental health needs. Many connected their engagement with arts and culture as children to their capacity to think laterally as an adult or be innovative as an employee. Critically, they felt that anyone who wanted to engage in these activities could and should be able to.

Comparing these new findings with the findings of our previous focus groups with middle-aged middle Australians, we can see that the way Australians create, share, participate in and consume arts and cultural content and experiences is changing rapidly. Digital disruptions, changing demographics and a global cultural market are shaping opportunities and preferences. This has broad-reaching implications for the future of Australian society. The consequences could be hugely positive if the nation strategically capitalises on these implications now.

ANA has been calling for a National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan to help Australia respond to and anticipate these changes. Governments, businesses, philanthropists, cultural organisations and creators can all play roles in this transformation. The findings of this work with young middle Australians add fresh urgency to ensuring our public and private investments are directed towards arts and cultural opportunities that are relevant and significant in twenty-first-century Australia.

This report tells the stories of young middle Australians' engagement with arts and culture in their own words. The findings may surprise you, but not always in the ways you might expect. At a time when a third of all young Australians report serious or very serious concerns about their mental health,¹ we hope this report provides nuanced insights into aspects of life that can bring this generation a sense of connectedness, happiness and hope.

How sporting matches are like live arts and cultural events

Well, they [sportspeople] are performing. And yes, they're competing, which maybe is not an arts and culture element... But yeah, it's about the community, the spectacle, the excitement, the sounds. Everything that I think gives me the same sort of feelings and emotion that I experience when I go to a Fringe show [at the Adelaide Fringe Festival] or when I go for a drink at Winter Festival down at the beach, and there's performers there and fireworks and stuff like that. I think it's the same sort of emotions and feelings that I get from it.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 27, SOUTH AUSTRALIA, ANGLO-SAXON, ACCOUNTANT)

Summary of key findings

Young middle Australians think:

Finding 1

Arts and culture are embedded in and inseparable from everyday life, partly because digital and physical experiences are so thoroughly intertwined. It is impossible for them to imagine a world without arts and culture as they access these experiences constantly. Any approach that treats arts and culture as separate, or 'add-ons' to daily life, will not make sense to this cohort.

Finding 2

The stigma that some Australians attach to high arts is largely absent. They are as keen to engage with traditional 'high arts' as they are to engage with any other kind of arts and cultural experience, as long as those experiences are accessible and the stories they tell feel relevant.

Finding 3

Australia's arts and cultural content should reflect the diversity of our population, and the stories of our First Nations peoples. This cohort believes arts and culture help deepen Australians' understanding of different people and perspectives, and also help tell Australia's diverse range of stories to international audiences.

Finding 4

Arts and culture are community-building tools that help mitigate loneliness and social isolation. Consequently, this cohort believes politicians and governments have a critical role to play in supporting cultural and creative organisations and industries.

Finding 5

Childhood interactions with arts and culture influence creative thinking in adulthood, as well as innovation outcomes in the workplace and in society more broadly. However, they worry that the cognitive, social and emotional benefits are decreased when schools are poorly equipped or choose to reduce the time spent on arts and culture in the classroom.

Summary of key opportunities

Public policy initiatives that would serve the interests of or be supported by young middle Australians:

Opportunity 1

Prepare and implement a National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan to inform more coherent, non-partisan policy settings and investments, and clarify responsibilities across the three levels of government. Digital disruption, changing demographics and a global cultural market are changing our opportunities and preferences; a Plan will help Australia respond to, and anticipate, these changes.

Opportunity 2

Update policy, regulatory and legislative settings to reflect the value young middle Australians place on: (1) making arts and cultural experiences and infrastructure accessible to people wherever they live, (2) increasing accessibility in the way public spaces are designed, and (3) making interactive engagement activities a priority.

Opportunity 3

To mitigate loneliness, social exclusion and social isolation among young middle Australians, prioritise using arts and cultural activities in existing and new initiatives, especially in placemaking and community-building, recognising that they can be creators, consumers, co-collaborators and enthusiastic attendees.

Opportunity 4

To support good lifelong outcomes for young people, arts and culture, and the benefits of engaging, should be taught consistently at school. This is especially relevant for those from lower-to middle-income families and those living in outer suburban and regional areas. This could be supplemented by subsidy programs for arts and cultural activities and/or tuition to ensure cost is not a barrier to access for any Australian child.

Opportunity 5

Prioritise schemes, incentives and requirements that support production and distribution of diverse Australian content and iconography that is relatable to young middle Australians in all communities across Australia. This includes drawing on Australia's cultural inheritance to create international public diplomacy initiatives that celebrate Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture as well as the diverse stories of our multicultural nation.

Opportunity 6

Take an industry transformation approach to supporting arts and cultural organisations in pivoting to digital, given the importance that Australians, especially young middle Australians, are now placing on digital engagement with arts and culture.

Introduction

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Introducing this report

This report provides current insights into the attitudes and beliefs held by 'young middle Australians' towards arts and cultural engagement and the role it plays in their lives. It presents the findings of a national focus group study of 18–29-year-old 'undecided voters' from low- and middle-income families, predominantly living in outer suburbs, regional areas and federal marginal electorates.

How ANA defines 'middle Australians'

- swing or undecided voters
- from low and middle income households
- living in regional or outer suburban locations

Our oldest participants were 29 years old, born in 1992. By 2061, they will have just joined the 23% of Australians aged over 65 (up from 16% in 2019–20).²

ANA's interest in the views of young middle Australian stems from the role they will play in shaping both our politics and our culture over the coming decades, particularly as our population ages. A disproportionately high percentage of young people are currently undecided or swing voters.³

Many of the young middle Australians we spoke to have lived their whole lives in a world of instant, digital connection.⁴ For their generation, their sense of belonging lives in these ongoing interactions, and the importance they place on relationships is more related to shared values and worldview than it is to physical proximity. Information, data and access is automated. A privacy trade-off is assumed. As artificial intelligence tools facilitate day-to-day choices, this highly

educated generation will likely increase their expectations of transparency, personalisation and access.

While it is easy to focus on the technological details in this period of change, it is the shift in how people are connecting to each other and 'where' they feel they belong that is more striking. The challenges this presents for creating a society that is cohesive, with a sense of belonging and shared identity, are stark. These changes are not only technological: they are also cultural.

Our earlier work with middle-aged, middle-income swing voters in outer suburbs and regional areas showed that that cohort has an immense enthusiasm for arts and culture, and that they place a particular priority on people that are younger than them being able to access arts and cultural experiences to assist with connection, development and wellbeing.

This new report asks what the adult offspring of middle Australians think. We spoke to young people from every state and territory to find out how they define arts and culture, what role arts and cultural engagement plays and how important it is to their lives, their communities, their families, society and the economy.

It's massive in my life...for young people, our age, it's huge. Living in Brisbane, it's like, if you didn't have the arts, that would suck, and you would want to move to Melbourne, which is known for its art and stuff like that. It would be high on my list, if I was thinking of who to elect, and what their stance is on the arts.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 29, QLD, ENGLISH/AUSTRALIAN, YOUTH WORKER)

The findings highlight that young middle Australians, much like the generation before them, see arts and culture as central to their lives. They describe their engagement with arts and culture as inseparable from their other everyday activities – it is woven into the fabric of daily existence.

This is good news for Australia, because engagement with arts and culture has been found to have a wide range of positive impacts, not only on individuals but on societies. International and Australian research has confirmed that when young people engage with arts and cultural activities, they develop greater resilience and self-discipline, have higher levels of motivation and better skills in emotional regulation, and report increased levels of emotional wellbeing and life satisfaction. In addition to the positive impact these outcomes have on their personal and professional lives as adults, these factors also seem to increase civic behaviours like volunteering and engaging with democratic processes.⁵

Many of the 18–29-year-olds saw 'the arts' as encompassing everything from doodles in your sketchpad to massive murals on the sides of buildings, from listening to music to dancing around your living room on a Zoom call with your friends during lockdown, through to attending multi-arts street festivals and the ballet. The key, uniting element, as one participant described it, was that 'ultimately, it's all about people. Art is one of the most uniquely human things that we do'.

I think it could be anything really, it could be from sculptures, to artwork, to music, to writing a book, to writing a play, maybe being a director for example, creating a movie. Architecture as well, I think, can be artistic.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, TAS, AUSTRALIAN GERMAN EGYPTIAN HUNGARIAN, PART-TIME TEACHER)

The key difference between the generations of middle Australians in these two studies, was the one that was most expected: young middle Australians see *digital* engagement as an essential part of their arts and cultural experience. What was perhaps surprising, however, was that digital engagement hasn't *replaced* the importance of experiencing arts and culture in person, live and in proximity to others; for most, it's just a natural part of those kinds of experiences. Like their parents, young middle Australians place high value on the opportunities that in-person arts and cultural experiences

provide: to be together, be a part of a community and to connect with others both like and not like them.

These generations may have many differences in their experience of life in Australia and their future horizons, but on this they are united: arts and culture are embedded in our way of life, and essential, as one participant put it, to our 'progression as humans'. As such, arts and culture will play an increasingly critical role in shaping our nation's future direction, as the arts and culture that young Australians so enthusiastically engage with will have a pervasive influence on how they think and behave. This will, in turn, inform both the opportunities and preferences of many Australians in the coming decade.

The next generation of voters: Young middle Australians talk arts, culture and creativity has two parts:

- In Part 1, we explore the findings from 21 focus groups conducted with 84 young middle Australians across every state and territory in Australia.
- In Part 2, we discuss the implications of these findings in light of existing research and identify opportunities for change to help build a more inclusive and relevant arts and cultural landscape.

This report tells the stories of young middle Australians' engagement with arts and culture in their own words. The findings may surprise you, but not always in the ways

you might expect. At a time when a third of young Australians report serious or very serious concerns about their mental health,⁶ this report provides nuanced insights into aspects of life that can bring this generation a sense of connectedness, happiness and hope as they navigate a life of change.

As ANA continues to call for the development of a National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan, we have prioritised understanding the views of this cohort of new voters to help inform necessary discussion about ensuring our public and private investments are directed towards arts and cultural opportunities that are relevant and significant in Australia now and in 2061.

Understanding young people's cultural engagement

Cultural engagement among young Australians at a glance

Young people have high rates of creating, actively participating in and attending arts and cultural activities.

Younger Australians are great at 'turning up' to cultural events and venues and are more likely to attend than their older counterparts. More than 88% of male 18–34 year olds and more than 90% of females in the same age group attended a cultural event or venue in 2017–18.⁷

They are also very active in their own creativity, such as making, performing, writing and playing an instrument. In fact, 15–24 year olds have the highest frequency of participation of any Australian age group – and that doesn't even include participation in arts and culture as part of formal study at school or university.⁸

Why do some young people engage with arts and culture, and others don't?

The research suggests:

- sociodemographic factors like gender, age, residential location, household income etc.
- physical health and disability
- engagement with arts and cultural activities at school
- participation in other kinds of activities and experiences, such as sport or clubs
- access (especially during the Covid-19 lockdowns).

Want more? Check out [Appendix 1: About cultural engagement](#).

Research design: A brief overview

The people we spoke to: 'young middle Australians'

What is a 'young middle Australian'?

Between April and June 2021, we conducted 21 online focus groups with 84 young Australians across every state and territory in Australia. We have called the participants in this study 'young middle Australians'. This, like the term 'middle Australians' used in our 2020 report, is a descriptive term. We use it in this report to describe people who were recruited to this study because they met all of the following criteria:

- They are 18–29 years old.
- They self-identify as 'undecided voters' – that is, they have not yet decided who they will vote for in the next federal election or have changed their mind on who they will vote for at least once in the last 12 months.
- Their family's household income when they were growing up was either lower (up to \$70,000 per household) or middle (\$70–\$150,000 per household).
- Their parents worked in 'lower- or middle-prestige' occupations when they were growing up, in jobs such as taxi driver, gardener, painter, real estate agent, retail and hospitality roles, teachers and carers.⁹

- They now live in outer suburban or regional locations (irrespective of where they grew up).
- Neither they, nor their parents or other immediate family members, have worked in arts and culture as their primary occupation.

Why focus groups?

As mentioned, this study spoke to 84 young Australians. This would not be a huge number if we'd been conducting a survey, but we didn't need to conduct a survey – there are already several national surveys about young Australians' engagement with arts and culture, as we'll discuss in [Part 2](#) of this report. But more importantly, surveys can only tell researchers information about the questions they've included in the survey; focus groups and other qualitative methods allow participants to lead the discussion, meaning they often make connections and provide insights that the researchers didn't even know to ask about. By talking to young people from every state and territory, living in both cities and regional areas, we sought not to provide a representative sample, but instead to explore a wide range of different perspectives from a politically and socially important Australian sub-population.

Why talk to young middle Australians?

Our initial interest in this cohort stemmed from the descriptions middle-aged middle Australians gave about the generational differences between themselves and younger generations in our previous research. But there are other important reasons to talk to this specific segment of the Australian population:

- As Australia ages, today's young Australians will become one of the most influential voting groups and will occupy a key demographic for decades to come.
- A disproportionately high number of them are undecided or swing voters.¹⁰ We focused on undecided rather than swing voters in this piece because at the younger end of our participants' age range, participants had not voted in more than one election and therefore were not in a position to have yet 'swung' their vote from one party to another. But we argue that the characteristics of these participants are remarkably like those of swing voters - they are typically less interested in politics from an

ideological standpoint, but they do care about how political policy positions are going to affect them and the people they care about. They can also be difficult for political parties to reach, especially in an era of digital niches and echo chambers.¹¹

- Existing research laid out later in this report also shows that this key demographic are currently, and may remain, the most active consumers, participants and attendees when it comes to arts and cultural experiences.

Together, all these factors make young middle Australians a cohort of interest, and their perceptions of arts and culture an invaluable resource for a range of different stakeholders.

About the participants in this study

In addition to being young, undecided voters from low- to middle-income households, many of our participants had other things in common:

- Most participants were registered to vote in a marginal federal electorate. Many of the participants from non-marginal electorates were in the ACT, which has no marginal federal seats. (See [Appendix 2](#) for a breakdown of participants' electorates.)
- 46% identified as male, 54% identified as female.¹²
- 39% were Gen Y (or millennials), 61% were Gen Z.
- 29% came from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background. Participants described their cultural backgrounds in their own words, and these descriptions included (among others), Indian, Chinese, Hungarian, Portuguese, Kiwi, British, Malaysian, Taiwanese, French, German, Egyptian, Greek, Macedonian and Pakistani, as well as Anglo-Saxon, Australian or Caucasian.
- 18% spoke different languages at home while growing up, including Hindi, Greek, Urdu, French, Portuguese, Mandarin and Malay.
- 6% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- 5% mentioned having children (although this wasn't a question we explicitly asked).
- 14% were students, either in secondary school, technical/vocational school or university.
- All had access to an internet connection and computer with which to participate in the focus groups.

Collecting the data

Participants were recruited by specialist recruiting firms in each state and territory, using a range of online and offline recruitment tools inviting 18–29-year-olds to participate in research about 'social issues'. Participants were not advised in advance that they would be participating in a focus group about arts and culture. Data was collected during 90-minute online focus groups, conducted by the Social Research Centre using virtual meeting software Zoom. Both the moderator and the participants joined from their homes, and most used both video and audio to connect with the group. At least 1 male group and 1 female group were conducted in each state and territory.

Analysing the findings

The focus groups were audio and video recorded using the inbuilt Zoom recording software and were then transcribed and analysed for recurring themes across the groups using qualitative coding software.

Presenting the findings

This report provides participants' perspectives on arts and culture, often through their own words. However, it's important to note that the quotes presented throughout this report are not the only instances of each theme being mentioned; they merely exemplify the kinds of things participants were saying about that topic. Each quote is followed by the quoted participant's demographic details, as described in their own words (e.g. self-identifies as female, 18, Tasmanian, Chinese Australian, hospitality worker).

Want more?

For more detailed information about this research, please see [Appendix 2: Technical appendix - Research design and methodology](#)



Figure 1: Stock image of an online focus group. The Covid-19 pandemic catalysed significant disruption to the social research industry, and most social research organisations moved to offering online focus groups in 2020. This ensured that qualitative research could continue during this important time of social change. The increase in individuals working and studying from home during this period increased Australians' familiarity and comfort with online and video conferencing tools, making online focus groups a more accessible option for social research than ever before. Image source: Anna Shvets.

How to use this report

This report provides insights into the perceptions of arts and culture held by a specific segment of the Australian population: a cohort we are calling young middle Australians – that is, 18–29-year-old undecided voters from low- to middle-income families, living in outer suburbs and regional areas. In this section we outline how the report may be used by a range of different stakeholder groups.

For elected members and policy advisers

Use this report to better understand both the priorities of young middle Australians when it comes to arts and culture, and the language they use to discuss those priorities. This may assist you in strategic discussions about effective investment in arts and culture and in exploring new policy opportunities with your stakeholders.

For cultural and creative organisations and individuals

Use this report to gain new insights into the attitudes and priorities of a group of consumers you may not have chosen to target your work towards previously. It may assist you in considering new markets, new types of engagement and new ways to understand the relevance of what you do. It may also assist in preparing advocacy documents and grant applications.

For philanthropists and sponsors of arts and culture

Use this report to gain up-to-the-minute understandings of the arts and cultural activities most valued by young middle Australians. This may assist in strategic discussions about what investments may be relevant or a priority to your desired outcomes.

For researchers and educators

Use this report as a fact-checked, reliable resource providing new insights into understandings of Australian young people and engagement with Australian arts and culture.

For the interested public

Use ANA's reports and papers as an introduction to some of the things stakeholders take into account when determining what effective, relevant investment in a rich cultural life looks like. Consider this report an accessible, qualitative overview of the attitudes and priorities towards arts and culture held by many young Australians in the twenty-first century.

For the media, content creators and platforms for creative content

Use this report to better understand the interests of young middle Australians regarding arts and culture. Get in touch with ANA about media opportunities using the contact details on p. 2.

Part 1: Findings

In this section:

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Young middle Australians value the capacity that arts and cultural activities have to help them express themselves, connect with others both alike and different to them, feel inspired, learn new things and think differently about the things they already know. Engaging with arts and culture is not the only means they use to get those needs met – but it's most assuredly one of their favourites. These young Australians told us that arts and culture are embedded in every aspect of their lives, every day, in almost every kind of activity. They connected them to their enjoyment of sport, their choices of fashion and interior design, their leisure time, their attendance to their mental health needs and their capacity to work through difficult experiences. Many connected their engagement or non-engagement with arts and culture as children with their capacity to think laterally as adults or be innovative as employees.

In Part 1, we explore the findings from 21 focus groups conducted with 84 young middle Australians across every state and territory in Australia. They gave us their perspectives on and perceptions of the following questions:

1. What *is* 'arts and culture'?
2. What is *Australian* arts and culture?
3. What is the value of arts and culture *to society*?
4. What is the value of arts and culture *to them, personally*?
5. How do the cultural and creative industries *work*?

We conclude Part 1 by providing a comparison with our 2020 middle Australia work, which shows the areas where these generations are aligned and the topics about which they diverge.

Part 1 Q1: What is 'arts and culture'?

1.1.1

The criteria for arts and culture

Arts and culture, according to young middle Australians, first and foremost involve activities and objects that relate to self-expression and creative stimulation. Discussion of definitions across the 21 focus groups boiled down to activities or objects needing to meet at least three of the following four criteria to be counted as arts and culture:

- It is a form of creative expression or self-expression and can be used for self-discovery.
- It has 'substance' - it makes you think or experience something more deeply or provides inspiration.
- It tells a story.
- It can be engaged with in the company of others.

Let's unpack each of these in turn.

Self-expression and self-discovery

There was strong agreement that expression – either a creator expressing themselves or a consumer using their choices of arts and culture as a means of self-expression – was fundamental to a definition of arts and culture. Participants believe arts and culture should help you communicate yourself to others and even learn new things about yourself.

For me it's about, in a way, self-discovery, finding that creativeness in you – you know, bringing ideas and concepts that are new, that people can look at and observe — something along those lines I'd say.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 24, NSW, MACEDONIAN, IT SUPPORT)

To be free to be yourself, I guess, is arts and culture...people need to be able to be free to express themselves in their culture.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, TAS, AUSTRALIAN, HOME DUTIES)

[Responding to the question of whether putting up a TikTok video of yourself doing a dance taught to you by your grandparents counts as arts and culture] I think any form of self-expression, like dancing or recreating – it was their grandparents' dance or whatever? That's their culture and their experience coming through as a creative form of dancing on a TikTok video, I guess.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, HOSPITALITY)

Substance and inspiration

Like their older counterparts, most participants felt that 'mindless entertainment' shouldn't count as arts and culture. Something could be entertaining, but it also had to make you think about things differently. It couldn't only be about 'numbing out'. Arts and culture should be able to be experienced *deeply*; one should become immersed in the experience if it is arts and culture.

I agree with challenging the status quo with arts. I think they're important to change the status quo and challenge ideas and make people uncomfortable, but in a good way, for growth. So, a world without arts, you'd probably just end up with, no growth, just a very stagnant culture.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 21, NSW, AUSTRALIAN, SELF-EMPLOYED)

[On playing video games] It's just super brain-numbing, so it doesn't really open your mind to anything; you get on there and just – numb out for an hour...so you're not really expanding yourself.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, WA, EUROPEAN, STUDENT)

One of the things I put up [as words associated with arts and culture] was emotional intelligence. That's because I think there's a definite link between people being able to experience arts and culture and being able to foster emotional – I don't know, just look at that deeper side. I just think it is important for the soul, to be able to experience.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 25, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, STUDENT)

Storytelling

Many participants felt that storytelling was key to arts and culture, whether the story was explicitly presented or had to be inferred. Participants were comfortable with the idea that visual art, even abstract visual art could tell a story ('they do say a picture can tell a thousand words'), and that different people would take different stories away from the same piece of art – and that was not only okay but part of the value of arts and culture.

You're trying to tell a story; that counts as arts and culture for me.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 23, SA, AUSTRALIAN/ASIAN, CLEANER)

I wouldn't say that Flappy Bird was arts and culture...If the game had a story that's written into it or...I think actually, mostly if there's a story to it.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS TRANS MALE, 22, NT, CAUCASIAN, COVID-19 SCREENER)

Art can make people think very differently because *I* can look at a piece of art, and *you* could look at a piece of art, and we could see completely different things, and it helps someone to reflect their own person.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 18, VIC, ANGLO, YEAR 12 STUDENT)

The company of others

Arts and culture were seen by participants as a key way to relate to and communicate with others – an important means of coming together with friends, family and community. But some took this a step further, believing that if you were not with others it didn't count as arts and culture at all. For these participants, arts and culture were synonymous with community, or at the very least, building community was arts and culture's express purpose.

I really went back and forth on whether to say yes or no [to whether playing a game on your phone counts as arts and culture]... I think for me, art and culture is if you're experiencing it with other people...games where you can connect with other people, I think that is then verging into arts and culture.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, ETHICS OFFICER)

The only time I listen to music on the radio is if I'm in the car with other friends and things like that. That, for me, is a form of arts and culture because you're sharing – you're listening to a lot of those classic songs that everyone knows and everyone goes and sings along to it, and that, to me, is arts and culture.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 23, NT, TAIWANESE, UNEMPLOYED)

Ultimately, it's all about people. Art is one of the most uniquely human things that we do. Art and cooking – that's humanity, so – yeah – just being creative; bringing people together; community; that's art and culture to me.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, GRAPHIC DESIGNER)

The notion of connection and community had various manifestations. Participants discussed connecting with others in a range of contexts, including:

- as audience members, either attending solo or with friends or family
- sharing on social media to introduce others to what they were watching, listening to or experiencing and receiving these sharings from others in return
- collaborating to create and/or perform arts and cultural content.

By their powers combined...

Of course, many activities that are not 'arts and culture' may also meet one or more of these criteria of self-expression and self-discovery; substance and inspiration; storytelling; or being in the company of others. But for these participants, combining several of them helped an activity or object 'add up' to an arts and cultural experience. Take this quote from a participant grappling with why he did not feel that listening to music on your own is a form of arts and culture:

I think, similarly with games, and even reading novels, listening to music on the radio, you're on your own...it kind of lacks a bit of community, and, and group enjoyment. So yes, it's a form of entertainment, but – but if you have music *mixed* with stories like you get from a novel, *mixed* with a bit of engagement like you get from games, then that sort of *forms*, like, arts and culture, in my mind, as opposed to each of these things stripped out individually.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 27, SA, ANGLO-SAXON, ACCOUNTANT)

Here, the participant describes all four of the criteria listed above, pointing out that they cannot stand alone for him as arts and culture, but together they create something bigger than the sum of their parts.

This is an important finding because it helps us to make sense of the diversity of inclusions and exclusions in the definition of arts and culture among this generation. As one participant pointed out, different people take different things away from any given arts and cultural experience. The discussions around whether performing a dance and uploading it on TikTok make for a good example.

Some participants *did* count creating a dance on TikTok as a form of arts and culture, and those participants typically described their engagement with the platform with at least three of the following:

- TikTok videos are a form of self- or cultural expression.
- A dance can tell a story.
- TikTok is a platform that gives you ideas of things to try – a catalyst for inspiration – and/or the rolling nature of the videos creates a form of immersion.
- TikTok is a platform that allows you to connect with others in a digital community.

Those who did *not* feel that a dance on TikTok was arts and culture typically felt at least two of the following things:

- The TikTok platform and the pace of the videos (15 seconds max) make it impossible for there to be any substance, rendering it 'mindless entertainment'.
- For them, digital communities didn't count as being together with others.
- They felt that most TikTok clips were too derivative and that copying other people's ideas did not qualify as self-expression.
- They saw TikTok as the video version of early Instagram – people taking photos of what they had for breakfast – and didn't feel there was any storytelling involved.

1.1.2

Digital and IRL: Arts and culture can be (almost) anything and is everywhere

A surprising number of participants' first responses to the question 'what is arts and culture' were along the lines of 'it could be almost anything'. They saw these activities as totally ubiquitous, as 'embedded' in everything we do, every day. Some mentioned how the clothes and accessories we wear, the way we decorate our spaces, the soundscapes we walk through on our way to work or study, and so many of the conversations we have with friends and colleagues, all have their origins in arts and culture.

It's hidden or embedded in your life so you kind of don't notice it until you think about it.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, SA, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT)

Well, I have 'life' [as a word associated with arts and culture] because basically, my life revolves around art and culture...I'm Aboriginal, so everything I basically do revolves around art and culture.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 22, NT, ANGLO/ATSI, PROJECT OFFICER)

One of the reasons they felt arts and culture had such a big role to play in the lives of their generation was because they could access arts and cultural content and experiences wherever they were, at any time of day or night, because of their familiarity and comfort with digital technologies. This was the main point of difference that they felt there was between their generation and older generations.

I feel like older generations couldn't express themselves as much as we can, and so we are able to make, like [other participant] said, digital art - GIFs and different animations and things like that. And then, to someone that is older, like, for example, my mum...I don't think she would see art like that...I think she'd more think of classical Indian dancing or singing or movies and things like that. But for people our age, it's more than just that; it's everything on social media and much more.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, WA, AUSTRALIAN/INDIAN, STUDENT)

‘Our generation is just completely different’: Digital usage among young vs middle-aged middle Australians

One of the most striking differences between arts and cultural engagement for young versus middle-aged middle Australians was in how they felt about and interacted with the online world. While for young middle Australians, digital engagement was ubiquitous and totally embedded into their lives, the 35–60-year-olds described a distance between themselves and the technologies they used, even when they were comfortable with the idea of digital content being counted as arts and culture.

Young middle Australians saw their engagement with arts and culture online as a natural extension of their engagement with everything else using digital technologies. They described how their lives are lived less publicly than in older generations, because while older people look at them and think they’re not engaging with the world, just staring at their phones, they are, in fact, engaging with whole communities in those moments – it’s just that people in the same physical space can’t see it happening.

Tik Tok, Facebook and stuff, Snapchat, whatever it is, we’re expressing ourselves, our opinions, our videos, our dancing, our music, our culture – whatever we’re expressing, yet by pictures, video. And that’s all social media. It’s all technology. You know, you might be expressing your feelings or your interests by – when you’re gaming, if you game with friends or whatever, and it’s just a whole new world. Our generation is just completely different. The way we express, it’s all so – internal. The way they express it – everything would be in person. Back then, the generations before us, everything was face-to-face. Now, we’re face-to-face on cameras, over screens.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, NT, ANGLO/ITALIAN, RETAIL ASSISTANT)

Yeah, the internet has definitely helped with that, and having this online presence and things, I feel like really helps us stay connected. And that really means that arts and culture just became this much bigger, more developed part of our lives.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, TEACHER)

While not every middle-aged middle Australian looked at digital engagement negatively, there was often a sense that they didn’t understand the value in engaging with arts and culture via these platforms, as described in this quote from our 2020 research, made by a middle-aged middle Australian from Sydney.

I think times are changing, but, our generation, we see YouTube and TikTok as a waste of time. We don’t see the worth in it, but the young people are taking it on and making millions. It’s expression for them. They feel they can get ideas out. Whereas we see getting ideas out as more permanent – like paintings – these guys are saying ‘this is our talent, so we can do this’.

(MIDDLE AUSTRALIAN FEMALE, SYDNEY)

Young middle Australians believed that they had access to a broader range of arts and culture because of their engagement with digital forms. For participants who couldn’t or preferred not to access arts and culture in physical spaces, digital engagement gave them a viable alternative. This was described in the following quote from a participant who had identified as partially deaf, making it difficult for him to be comfortable with live arts and cultural experiences in physical spaces:

I am a consumer of arts...I browse the internet for new artwork to add to my personal art gallery — I keep a personal art gallery on my own computer for private browsing, and if I see art that I like, I will save it. But I’m not a person to go to a physical art gallery.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 23, SA, AUSTRALIAN/ASIAN, CLEANER)

They also felt that Australians had more opportunities to share their own creations with broader audiences when they engaged with digital technologies.

You know, social media stuff like TikTok has actually helped, kind of like, spread art more for the masses. And I think, for example, small places such as Wollongong where art might not be as valued as much, art from there can be valued by the rest of the world more.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, NSW, MACEDONIAN, PROJECT MANAGEMENT)

I feel like it's very important, especially because with media and stuff, we have the ability to experience so much more of it. And with the internet, and travel – I feel like our generation is lucky in that way, that we get to experience more art and culture than probably any other generation before.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, SA, ENGLISH/HUNGARIAN, DEFENCE)

Some of the middle-aged middle Australians shared this view, believing that the internet had opened Australia up and given Australians' access to a much broader range of content and ideas. However, this was sometimes seen as something of a threat to national identity, as suggested in this quote by a middle Australian man from Melbourne...

Absolutely. Definitely it's important to have Australian artists and movie makers and musicians and writers. Now it's a global market, everyone can use the internet and everything, so yes, we should give priority to Australian content.

(MIDDLE AUSTRALIAN MALE, MELBOURNE)

...while other middle Australians were concerned that it was causing young people to lose their creativity, as they were just imitating what they saw online rather than creating new things, as this middle-aged Melbourne woman pointed out.

They look at other videos, too, for example South Korea music, hip hop that is popular these days – so they just go onto TikTok and try to mimic them.

(MIDDLE AUSTRALIAN FEMALE, MELBOURNE)

Young middle Australians saw this trend of imitating online content quite differently. For them, it was about using an original piece as inspiration to build not only new artworks but also new communities.

Generational perspective? I'd say the older generation would say we are losing touch with tradition in the arts. Because – like, for us, I guess, we kind of use the tradition as the source to create new ideas from it and create our own, new genre in arts. And I guess, in a way, to the older generation, it may seem like a disgrace, or something really bad. But – from generation to generation, it might differ.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 23, NT, TAIWANESE, UNEMPLOYED)

I think it's like I said before, arts and culture's just communication. It's so hard to communicate with people, especially with everything being online. So we communicate through memes and Facebook and all of that kind of thing. And that's really a form of art. And it's our culture as well. And without that, it would be really difficult to communicate and

connect with people from our generation.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, HOSPITALITY)

Another interesting difference between the generations was that when middle-aged middle Australians talked about digital arts and culture, they were typically imagining exchanging traditional forms of creation for digital replacements...

Like graphic design, digital drawing, like on a tablet, instead of in the traditional form.

(MIDDLE AUSTRALIAN FEMALE, SYDNEY)

...while, for young middle Australians, the digital forms of engagement were often part of 'real life' experiences – the experiences were always intertwined, just to varying extents. You always have a physical body that is interacting with a physically present device in order to engage with online forms of arts and culture, and no matter what physical experience you are having, it's possible to also be sharing that experience with your online communities, either simultaneously or in an asynchronous and more curated way.

Everyone loves going to gigs and taking artsy pictures of things on Instagram and those sorts of things, so we're all sharing all the time and that's what culture is – sharing, communicating, linking together.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, GRAPHIC DESIGNER)

While middle-aged middle Australians typically did not recognise the community-building aspects of sharing content on social media that young middle Australians described as the essential element of the activity, some could nonetheless appreciate the creativity involved in producing the content – as we can see in this quote from a middle Australian Sydney man:

The girls are taking selfies all the time – that's constant art – and then manipulating the pictures to make them look better; that's creative.

(MIDDLE AUSTRALIAN MALE, SYDNEY)

These generational differences are important for policy makers to note. Any approach that treats arts and culture as separate to everyday life will be met by young middle Australians with looks of blank incomprehension and disengagement. For this cohort, arts and culture are woven into their daily experience; they are not an add-on, or a 'nice to have'.

1.1.3 Arts and cultural activities: Consuming vs attending vs creating

More than their older counterparts, young middle Australians differentiated between consuming, attending and creating arts and culture, with consumption (particularly if one is consuming on one's own rather than in the company of others) often initially being excluded from a definition of arts and cultural activity. For example, many participants initially did not include the act of reading a novel or listening to music alone as an arts and cultural activity, though there was no debate as to whether *writing* a novel or *creating* a piece of music fitted the criteria.

I think it's the process of learning how to do that - to *make* the art is what counts as art and culture...I don't think reading counts as arts and culture. Making the book and talking about the book - I think that, in and of itself, is the art, but the reading isn't.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 23, SA, AUSTRALIAN/ASIAN, CLEANER)

On the other hand, many of the participants who initially felt that they wouldn't include consumption as a cultural activity either changed their minds after discussion with the group, or at least modified their responses:

Reading itself is not arty but writing a novel is an art. But [pause] I guess it depends how visual you are. If you're a reader sitting there and imagining the whole world around you, that's kind of creative and arty.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, TAS, AUSTRALIAN, ADMIN)

Playing games on one's phone was another example where participants were 'on the fence', though they were relatively comfortable that the act of *creating* a video or mobile game was an arts and cultural activity.

As someone who's currently studying with a bunch of game designers and game artists, the amount of work and the amount of artists - the sheer number of creative people involved in the process of making even just a simple little Match 3 game [like Candy Crush] is incredible. And then, again, because I considered arts and culture to be really about the culture and the community, you've got multiplayer games, you've got co-op games which are bringing people together through play, which is something that we don't get enough of as adults.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, GRAPHIC DESIGNER)

Attending live arts and cultural events and venues, while not an act of creation, was typically included as an arts and cultural activity, and was indeed one of the activities participants were most enthusiastic about. This was typically because attending live events easily met at least three, usually four of the abovementioned criteria: participants were attending with others, observing and participating in self-expression, having an immersive experience, and there were often storytelling elements to the event. The following quotes are in response to the moderator's question, 'Do you engage with arts and culture in your personal life?'

For me, music festivals was a big part of it, like the atmosphere, the aura, the air - when you go to a live show, I think you're just unbeatable, you're really just on cloud nine, it's an insane feeling.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 24, NSW, MACEDONIAN, IT SUPPORT)

I like to go to interactive exhibitions with friends. There was one on ages ago at the Docklands. It was kind of like a jumping castle kind of thing. I forgot what it was called, but...it's good to go out to events with friends, like, whether it be food, or other kinds of festivals, or like, seeing a comedy show or something like that.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, SA, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT)

1.1.4

Arts vs culture vs 'arts and culture'

Unlike the 35–60-year-old middle Australians, these participants seemed to feel equally as comfortable with the term 'arts' on its own as they were with the broader term 'arts and culture' preferred by their older counterparts.

Culture and art: synonyms or just related?

Ultimately, participants across all focus groups felt that arts and culture are so indelibly linked as to be quite inseparable, even if they aren't the same thing.

It's probably on a continuum. I don't think you can ever have a mutually exclusive, of 'that's just art' or 'that's just culture'. But some of those activities, I'd go, 'Oh, that's *more* culture'. But it still had some aspects of art in it.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, ETHICS OFFICER)

A culture can be a feeling, a history. It sums up different places and people and the underlying feeling or experience for what that thing is. Whereas art is a way to then be able to express that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 27, VIC, CAUCASIAN, HOMELESS SERVICES)

Furthermore, for young middle Australians, the term 'arts' encompassed the same kinds of activities as the term 'arts and culture' did: from karaoke to tattooing, from opera to street festivals, from dancing in your room to writing a screenplay. That's not to say there was no debate over what could and should not be included in a definition of the arts – debate was enthusiastic and engaged across all the focus groups. But this cohort had no problem applying the term 'arts' well beyond elite artforms.

I think when you first mentioned art and culture, I was very mentally fixated on galleries – pieces of art on canvas. So, on the question of novels – and it was similar with Stan and Netflix – it threw me for a minute, and I had to mentally recalibrate and go, 'hang on; those *are* still forms of art'. And especially streaming – I really appreciate it. So, I think novels are definitely a form of art.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 25, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, STUDENT)

Some participants found using 'arts and culture' as a single term confusing or counterintuitive. For example, when the moderator would ask participants to consider a particular aspect of arts and culture, it was common for someone to ask whether the moderator wanted them to think about both or just one of those ideas.

Moderator: [explaining an activity to the group] As you go through each item, select whether you feel it fits within arts and culture or whether you feel it sits outside.

Participant: Is this including arts *and* culture or just arts?

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, WA, EUROPEAN, STUDENT)

Moderator: Think about 'arts and culture' as one thing.

[Several participants frown]

(FOCUS GROUP 13, WA MALES)

Moderator: What do you think the world would look like without arts and culture?

Participant: Without them both? At the same time? Pretty sh*t.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, VIC, AUSTRALIAN, TRADESPERSON)

(FOCUS GROUP 6, VIC MALES)

A minority of participants even felt that the terms were in conflict with each other. If culture was taken to be synonymous with society, then it inherently involved maintaining traditions and preserving things as they already are, while art should push against the status quo:

If you're someone who - I don't know, you want to change society in some way, then potentially, what you're going to be putting forward [in terms of art] is not going to be particularly popular or mainstream. In that sense, you're potentially going against the grain of society in some sense. Whereas, if you just go with what's socially acceptable [and therefore part of your existing culture], you *reinforce* the status quo. So I guess you could draw a distinction in terms of whether someone is really approaching things from an artistic perspective or a cultural perspective, in that sense.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 24, SA, CAUCASIAN, RECORDS OFFICER)

Conversely, others found the addition of 'culture' into the phrase helpful because they felt the term 'arts' was *too* broad and expansive:

Moderator: Any other thoughts there [about the term 'arts']? Anyone more comfortable with, say, 'arts and culture' or 'arts and entertainment' or 'arts and creativity', for capturing some of these activities [the less traditional examples provided as prompts]?

Participant: Yeah 100%. 'Arts' just by itself is - vague. It's big. Everything can be considered artistic, like - even rugby league, you know? So, it may need a different, extra word, a keyword to help narrow down what you're looking for.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 29, QLD, ENGLISH/AUSTRALIAN, YOUTH WORKER)

What's 'culture' anyway?

The definition of culture on its own was also not consistent with these participants - as is the case with this term in the academic literature. Although most participants seemed to immediately think of ethnic or national culture with this term...

I actually find that kids get into culture through reading. So a really popular example at the moment is they're reading a lot of the mangas and things like that. But they're also understanding a little bit more about the culture of Asian countries through the fact that they're reading the books backwards and it takes them a bit to understand that. So I feel like the books, in themselves, have a lot of culture in them. Because writers don't just come from one place.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, TEACHER)

...some were thinking of it in terms of subcultures, including cultures that develop online, as well as the idea of a 'local culture' in their own towns or suburbs...

I think even creating a TikTok video of you performing a dance. It certainly is cultural and it's a group activity that builds a culture - it builds an identity almost, and so even though that's online, you're not just doing it by yourself, one person - so it builds a local culture.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, TAS, ANGLO-SAXON, STUDENT)

...and a small minority used it to refer to the idea of 'being cultured'; that is, being the kind of person who engages primarily with 'high arts'.

Yeah, I grew up in a pretty non-cultural sort of family. My parents weren't very cultured. I was very typical - it was a very typical, Caucasian, very - I guess bogan sort of family.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, NSW, AUSTRALIAN, MEDICAL RECEPTIONIST)

Although definitions and perceptions differed, it's important to note that participants were comfortable using the three terms - arts, culture and 'arts and culture' - interchangeably.

1.1.5

High arts, or just...arts?

In our previous research, we noted that middle Australians often feel that the term 'arts' really means 'high arts' activities like opera and ballet, and importantly, often feel that high arts are 'not for people like them'.¹³ Despite never having attended any high arts events and venues, many of the 35-60-year-old participants from that study made negative assumptions about what they would be like, and how they would not enjoy experiences like that. Young middle Australians were less concerned about this. Although most of our 18-29-year-old participants had not attended those kinds of events *yet*, it was less because they didn't think they'd enjoy it and more that they hadn't had the opportunity. Consider this exchange between 18-29-year-old participants in the South Australian male focus group:

Moderator: Maybe if I threw some things at you like an opera or a ballet, is that something you would go and attend and check it out, or something that you probably wouldn't do?

Participant 1: If there were free tickets or something, I'd go and experience it; yeah; why not?
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 22, SA, GREEK/CYPRIOET ETHNICITY, DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE)

Moderator: How about you, [Participant 2]?

Participant 2: Yeah, if I found it generally interesting in terms of what it's about, yeah, I'd go.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 24, SA, CAUCASIAN, RECORDS OFFICER)

Participant 1: If there's a bit of a story behind it, why not?

Participant 3: Definitely, yeah. For me – I would normally, generally, not go to an opera, but there was this one time – does a musical count as an opera?
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 23, SA, AUSTRALIAN/ASIAN, CLEANER)

Moderator: It's probably slightly different, but it's down that same way.

Participant 3: There was the Aladdin Movie Musical. And if I was to go there with my hearing aid, straight up, I wouldn't appreciate it at all. But they had a built-in hearing system that allowed me to connect straight to the microphones and the instruments, so I was able to understand them very clearly and appreciated the show quite a lot.

Young middle Australians were also less likely than their middle-aged counterparts to feel that they had to take arts and culture seriously, with numerous participants commenting that one could be engaged with artforms – high or otherwise – in an ironic way:

I have been to an art gallery; I didn't take it as seriously as I probably should have... I don't think I could sit through a ballet unless I was making fun of it.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, NSW, AUSTRALIAN, MEDICAL RECEPTIONIST)

Or in another exchange, this group of men from WA discussed how one doesn't need to personally like

or enjoy a piece of art (or at least, the way the artist intended) for it to still be worthwhile or important to the community:

Moderator: [Following up on a previous discussion about a government-funded sculpture at the Perth Train Station that a participant had described as 'kind of a joke'.] Is the big green cactus¹⁴ worth preserving?

Participant 1: I think it is. Obviously, it started out as a bad idea, but now it's become – not an icon, but something that is talked about and – even joked about. But because of that, it's an identifiable part that everyone knows about and laughs about together.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 23, WA, ANGLO, UNEMPLOYED)

Participant 2: I think sometimes it's hard to say what's worth preserving, as well. Because at the time, a lot of things seem – out of place or – just wrong. The Eiffel Tower they were considering taking down because it was a thing that they made to show how good they were at using metal, so they were considering pulling it down, and now that's one of the most iconic things in the world, really...with the cactus, admittedly, while I think it's gross, I think it's iconic enough that people find it interesting...I don't think it should be destroyed, I guess.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 27, WA, ANGLO, STUDENT)



Figure 2: The sculpture near the Perth Train Station, formally called 'Grow Your Own', colloquially known as 'The Big Green Cactus'. Image source: Anthonyhcole, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

In conclusion: What is arts and culture?

In summary, young middle Australians believe that 'arts', 'culture' and the idea of 'arts and culture' are all so heavily embedded in our everyday lives that they can be, or be part of, just about anything. This cohort engages with arts and culture through their phones, their bodies, their minds, their jobs, their various other screens and via their family and friends. They want their arts and cultural activities to be about self-expression, immersion, storytelling and togetherness. And although 'arts' doesn't just mean 'high arts' to them, they're keen to try any activity or experience that arts and culture have to offer, including high arts activities, so long as they can get access to it, and it's telling the kinds of stories they are interested in.

Part 1 Q2: What is *Australian* arts and culture?

1.2.1

Diverse stories for a diverse nation

Participants were asked questions around policy areas like international diplomacy and both international and domestic tourism. They were prompted with questions about whether it is important to tell uniquely Australian stories, either when we are representing Australia internationally, or internally, when we are representing Australia to Australians. This sparked a lot of discussion around what 'uniquely Australian' meant:

I find it hard to – I think a lot of people don't – I don't know, it depends on who you're talking to, really, what they would consider Australian, or uniquely Australian...It's a hard thing to determine.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, HOSPITALITY)

Many pointed out how Australia's demographic profile has changed and how important it is for the stories we tell and the voices we hear to reflect those changes.

Australia is becoming very multinational. And so, I think that's a good reflection to have [in Australian content]. But not necessarily only the white Australian stories that we know, cos that can be quite hurtful.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, SA, ENGLISH/HUNGARIAN, DEFENCE)

I think there's so many different experiences of being Australian. It's not one shared, unified thing. It's this whole different range of how people express being Australian, and I think art is a way to express that and build their understanding of what that looks like for people outside of Australia coming into Australia, to get an idea that there's a really diverse range of people here.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, NT, ANGLO, PROJECT OFFICER)

They wanted Australian arts and culture to represent a 'true' or 'honest' version of our nation's past...

[When asked what unique Australian voices and stories should be heard] I definitely think straight to Aboriginal history...a lot of people tend to think that just because we weren't firsthand involved in it, that it doesn't really apply to us. But you just saw with the whole Black Lives Matter movement, Australia went mental about what was happening in America and realised that it's exactly what's happened here. I think there needs to be a lot more recognition of what happened back then and a lot more of their culture brought into ours. Not just the typical Aussie snag on the barbie, a lot more historical – about the culture that was based here before the colonisers came, because it was their land before it was ours.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 18, VIC, AUSTRALIAN, YEAR 12 STUDENT)

It sh*ts me that I was able to get so much about Captain Cook and the colonial side of it at school; I didn't really hear about any of the suffering that our First Nations people went through until they showed us Rabbit Proof Fence with no context in Year Six. The rest of it was just like 'good luck; figure it out for yourself'. If we're going to spend money to invest and preserve bits of history, we need to be honest about it. We need to explore both sides, including the sides that don't make us look good.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 25, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, STUDENT)

...and they wanted our arts and cultural landscape to help everyone (and especially non-Anglo-Celtic, LGBTIQ*, and differently abled Australians) feel that they belong.

It [existing Australian content] doesn't make me feel included, and I've lived here my whole life and so has my entire family and so have all my friends and, even though, yeah – we are Australian, and we have Australian citizenship and stuff, I feel there definitely needs to be an incorporation of what our background is, as well...I think there needs to be a shift in thinking and making art that is inclusive of everyone.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, WA, AUSTRALIAN/INDIAN, STUDENT)

I think so many people have been excluded from stories for so long, so – yeah; I think that's a big change...I think that women and queer people, or people with different intellectual abilities, all of these stories haven't been told for a really long time.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, NT, ANGLO-SAXON, CLEANER)

What kind of arts and culture does Australia do well?

Young middle Australians think Australia's Indigenous arts and culture is our most unique asset, they think our diversity of stories and voices makes us interesting, and they particularly love character-driven stories like those in the children's animated series 'Bluey'.

1.2.2

Representing Australia to ourselves and the world

Assuming that the stories being told were adequately representative of twenty-first century demographics, most participants did feel that it was important that Australian stories be told, both in Australian and international contexts, to solidify Australia's reputation and build a positive and constructive national identity, as is exemplified in this exchange from a South Australian female group.

Participant 1: I love ABC; I love so much of the stuff on the ABC and the voices that it gives to people who would not be heard otherwise. I think it is such a hugely important thing, and I think that's how – especially now social media's so big – people who wouldn't previously have engaged with things like the ABC, they're getting sponsored posts [in their social media feeds] of shows that expose them to a completely different facet of life that they might never experience or interact with. And I think it creates such a good opportunity for Australians to understand the life that other Australians lead, and I think that's a really, really important thing, because I don't think we spend enough time trying to empathise and put ourselves in

other people's shoes and I think having that Australian voice in the media, especially, through the arts and through TV shows and radio shows – I think that's a really huge and important thing.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, SCIENTIST)

Participant 2: I mean, Bluey is a very uniquely Australian production, and it is the number one Australian children's show in the world right now. And it is just so quintessentially Aussie in every way, I feel like it's important not only for Aussie kids to have that exposure to Australia. But people all round the world get exposure through Australian media and they learn that Australia is not just 'everything is going to kill you and we ride kangaroos to school'.

Moderator: The Crocodile Dundee effect?

Participant 2: Yeah, it breaks down some of those stereotypes. And so much of the media we consume is American nowadays; there's so much media that comes out of the US that it's starting to influence our culture as well, and global cultures. (SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, GRAPHIC DESIGNER)

However, several participants pointed out that the stereotypical view of Australian culture still doesn't compare favourably with other (particularly European) cultures:

I think it's made to be a little bit of a joke sometimes. My parents are from England, and they always say that when someone Australian walked into the pub or something like that, it was always made to be a bit of a joke. I think people don't know a lot about the culture of Australia...I think it could be communicated better in the rest of the world.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 18, VIC, AUSTRALIAN, YEAR 12 STUDENT)

And I think Australia as a whole – you go over to Europe, and you set foot in a country, and you can feel that culture a little bit, whereas Australia is a little bit more shoeys¹⁵ and fairy bread. So I think we should be celebrating that a little bit more. Not that there's anything wrong with shoeys and fairy bread, but there's more to Australia.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, ADMINISTRATION)



Figure 3: Photograph of artist John Murray painting a mural of Gundabooka man Percy Hobson, the first Indigenous Australian to win a gold medal for Australia at the Commonwealth Games in 1962, on a water tower in Percy Hobson Park, Bourke, Queensland in 2021.¹⁶ Silo art (typically murals on grain silos but sometimes also on water towers etc., as this one is) is becoming an increasingly common way for rural Australian towns or regions to communicate their values and identities, and attract tourists. Image source: By Q8682. CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=103741140>.

In conclusion:

What is Australian 'arts and culture'?

Young middle Australians think that Australian arts and culture should represent a wide array of different stories and voices, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people whose families migrated to Australia in recent years or who are new Australians themselves, people of different genders and sexual orientations, and people of different abilities. They are adamant that anything less than the full expression of our nation's diversity is cheating them - and future generations - out of their rightful cultural inheritance. They want this 'honest' representation of Australia, through our 'top-notch' arts and cultural offerings, to receive international recognition, and help other nations to understand how Australia is unique, and how much our nation has to offer.

Can talking about arts and culture change your perceptions of arts and culture?

At the end of each focus group, the final questions were always about whether participants' perceptions of arts and culture had changed throughout the discussion, whether their opinions had been strengthened or weakened and whether they found any aspect of the discussion especially interesting. For most participants, perceptions had indeed been changed, strengthened and sometimes even established for the first time.

I guess it's made me think about it, period. I guess I've never really sat down to think about what it means to me. But I guess now I'm realising how much it does encompass, especially in my life. How important it actually is.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, SA, ENGLISH/HUNGARIAN, DEFENCE)

I think talking about - this is a lot of stuff that I don't usually bring up to the front of my brain; it's in there, but it's not something that I'm consciously thinking about, so I think overall it's made me verbalise and be more conscious of what my ideals are to do with it.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS TRANS MALE, 22, NT, CAUCASIAN, COVID-19 SCREENER)

Participants found a number of things about the discussions particularly interesting. These came down to three general areas, including:

- They'd never considered that others may have different perspectives on arts and culture to them.

Since I have a very black and white thinking about art, I realise now that obviously, people can view art in a different way, and I wasn't aware of the way that people can view art other than mine until now.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, WA, AUSTRALIAN/INDIAN, STUDENT)

- Imagining a world without arts and culture came up repeatedly as something participants had never considered.

It definitely stuck out, the parts where we were talking about imagining life without arts and culture, that's something I'd never done before, and I suppose with the conclusions that we came to, it made sense that arts and culture is what defines us and sets us apart from, just, work robots.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 22, TAS, ANGLO-SAXON, SUPPORT WORKER)

It's made me rethink what society might be like without the arts and culture...I didn't really before think how much - what place arts and culture had in our society and what value they have. Imagining society without, say, the Green Cactus¹⁷ - it's just a different thing. [Group chuckles]
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, WA, EUROPEAN, STUDENT)

- Some participants commented that this was the first time they'd ever thought about there being a relationship between arts and culture and government. The idea of government funding came as a surprise to them, and for some, will even give them another thing to think about when it comes time to vote.

It's been pretty interesting...Definitely about government funding, about different museums when we were talking about that, it gives me a whole different topic to think about or even research into...And even how much they do budget into their yearly budget for that sort of stuff and where it goes.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, TAS, AUSTRALIAN, CUSTOMER SERVICE)

I guess one of the points you were making earlier was about how we feel about either it getting extra funding or less funding: I've been thinking, if they [arts and culture] were to receive a massive cut in their funding, I guess that would also show that there's something going wrong in the broader economy. Because we've seen a lot of positive economic growth and if we started to see that arts and culture was getting funding cuts, I don't think that's a good sign at all.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 26, WA, ANGLO-NEW ZEALANDER, WELDER)

I mean, even just thinking about personally I haven't really connected my voting choices to arts funding, and, like, I like to think I'm somewhat involved in politics - so it's been a bit of an eye opener to me about all the different things that I participate in, and how the government made choices in how they financially support that and potentially why they support it is something that I haven't thought about and - it's a really interesting thing.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 25, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, DATA ANALYST)

Part 1 Q3: What is the value of arts and culture *to society*?

In addition to the value that they saw to themselves as individuals, participants felt that arts and culture brought value to the broader Australian society and even to our development as humans.

Yeah, I think if we didn't have arts or culture, we...I don't think we'd really live in what you would describe as civilisation. Because I don't think you would have the people who are capable of driving societies forward.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 24, SA, CAUCASIAN, RECORDS OFFICER)

I think there'd be a lot more conflict, actually, because there'd be no real way to express yourself in that regard, it would be a lot harder to convey emotion, meaning and significance.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, VIC, HUNGARIAN/AUSTRALIAN, PART-TIME WORKER)

We asked participants if they could identify the value that arts and culture contributes to a number of specific public policy areas. The following policy areas are ordered by those that spontaneously evoked the most passionate discussions.

1.3.1

Place: Regional and urban development, cultural and environmental heritage

Placemaking and community-building

The clearest connection that participants made across all 21 focus groups was the role that arts and cultural activities play in placemaking and community-building. Participants felt that arts and culture brought people together, gave them a reason to meet and be a part of their broader communities, provided opportunities to be with friends and family and brought together people from different walks of life who wouldn't otherwise have spent time together. This was often brought up in terms of large-scale events like festivals and craft markets, but was also raised in relation to online communities and platforms:

I think culture definitely plays a big thing in society – how we speak and act with each other. Seeing – especially with stuff like YouTube – how different all these other cultures and different countries and things like that are, and learning that how we live life, and how we all act together isn't the only way that stuff goes on, I think that plays a big part in moving forward, being open to different kinds of people, different kinds of activities and things.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 23, WA, ANGLO, UNEMPLOYED)

Something that came through very clearly in this research that was not so apparent with the over-35 middle Australians was the importance of arts and cultural icons in building a collective identity with one's local community.

I put yes [for whether roadside sculptures are arts and culture] because there's Facebook pages about the Canberra ones, particularly the Penis Owl in Belconnen, so it feels that that adds a bit, to Canberra culture at least.¹⁸

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 22, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, STUDENT)

I completely agree with [other participant] on that as well, in that it forms part of the local community's culture, and I think of going to other cities where you have the Big Banana; the Big Mango. Those sculptures form part of the local community's culture specifically, and it's something that that culture, that community get well known for.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 28, ACT, SOUTH-EAST ASIAN, PHYSIO)



Figure 4: Photograph of “The Big Powerful Owl” sculpture in Belconnen, Canberra. Image source: Orthogonal1, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

Rapport between participants from different electorates within the same city or state built rapidly when they recognised arts and cultural activities or experiences that they had in common. As we saw earlier regarding the big green cactus sculpture discussed by a WA male group, participants didn't need to think the arts and culture was *good* in order for it to bring the group together and help them form a common bond. But in many cases, they *did* think it was good.

Participant: Yeah, in Adelaide, the Fringe is the thing we're most proud of; it's sort of the big thing that we've got. I think it's something that everyone participates in. There's almost no one you'd ever come across who hasn't at least gone to one Fringe show. It's a sense that the whole city's part of it.

Moderator: What do you think that means for Adelaideans?

Participant: It brings people together, definitely. It's that same sense of common pride in something. And support. And also just that, it's always a conversation point. No matter who you're talking to at that time of year, there's always that discussion about the Fringe.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 27, SA, ANGLO-SAXON, PHYSIO)

Some participants also pointed out that arts and culture can be a useful community-building tool that local politicians should take advantage of in representing their constituents. They saw it as an opportunity to connect with the cultural diversity of communities by both encouraging and financially supporting local arts and cultural activities.

Your local representative that represents the community should be representing their values. And I guess the only way that that is portrayed, or they can understand what the community wants would come out through arts and culture and what the community comes out to support or do.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, ETHICS OFFICER)

Cultural heritage

Arts and cultural activities were seen not only as ways to invigorate places and local cultures *now* but also as opportunities to gift the important or interesting aspects of a place's past or present to future generations.

To preserve that culture, it allows us to – it just gives future generations a chance to experience as much culture as possible. Obviously, the culture keeps flowing, keeps growing, but being able to give future generations a chance to experience the past is pretty important.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 26, NT, PAKISTANI, ENGINEER)

Groups were often divided over what should be preserved and how to decide what counted as important or interesting. However, most groups eventually came to one of two conclusions: 1) that arts and culture should be preserved if they are something we want our children and other future generations to know about, whether those icons are a source of pride, or a source of learning...

I was also going to say Uluru, because it's an Indigenous rock and now we're finally not allowed to climb on it again...It's an icon, especially for Australian Aboriginals. It's one thing that's, I guess, ours and always has been, I feel. Compared to everything else in Australia that got taken over and colonised, I feel like that sort of remained ours.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 23, NSW, ABORIGINAL, SEEKING EMPLOYMENT)

When, like, you're travelling – specifically in my experience – through outback Queensland, there's a bunch of smaller museums where they address a lot about each town's local history, and I think as a cultural – like a product of culture, that's really important so that we can see what's happened in the past, what experiences people throughout Queensland have had. I think a lot of them are community run, rather than being funded by levels of government specifically, but that's very much an important part of culture that some of these towns have been maintained with the backs of volunteers, sort of. They've just been putting this together, and I think that's really important, as part of our identity as an Australian. That this information is available.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 25, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, DATA ANALYST)

...and 2) that arts and culture should be preserved if they have the potential to enhance our reputation overseas.

Well, in terms of art and culture, I think the Sydney Opera House is really important. That has been a symbol of Australia forever – in fact, people think that's the capital – not so. I think that's so important, especially for arts and culture, because that not only provides a space for people to display the top-notch art that we have in Australia – the best of the best – but it also gives us a symbol of the appreciation that Australia has for art.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 22, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, STUDYING/DISABILITY SUPPORT WORKER)

Participants were given a list of possible cultural heritage sites and icons and asked whether any of them had significance to them personally, to society, to the economy and/or to lowering unemployment. Most people ticked every box for value to society. Meanwhile, the discussions around choosing or not choosing the other areas is summed up well by this quote:

'Personally' was the only one that I did or didn't tick on some of [the arts and cultural heritage icons on the list], but for 'society', 'the economy' and 'improving unemployment', I think I selected it for all of them. Although not all of these things might be things that I personally engage in in my day-to-day life, I think [preserving them] absolutely has an impact on the broader society, our economy and improving unemployment. The more diversity that we have in all of these areas, the more it's going to boost our economy, which in return boosts employment.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 27, VIC, CAUCASIAN, HOMELESS SERVICES)

Finally, participants were asked who they thought was currently responsible for preserving Australia's cultural heritage, and whether they agreed that the right people or bodies held those responsibilities. Overall, participants were unsure who held formal responsibility, but felt that it should be shared between individuals and governments.

I think it is – in a way it's all of ours. I don't know. It's really hard to give a specific name, but I suppose government is the system we currently have for collective responsibility, so yeah, which to me then ends up with, it's a government responsibility. But I also think it's something we should all try to be somewhat aware of, particularly for things that are important to us.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, NT, ANGLO, PROJECT OFFICER)

Government needs to put some money into making sure things are preserved and everything like that, but everybody has an individual responsibility: try and be as environmentally sustainable as you can and don't throw sh*t into the ocean and stuff like that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, ADMINISTRATION)

The environment

One perhaps surprising finding from this research is that young middle Australians see environmental heritage protection and cultural heritage protection as being closely related, sometimes even synonymous. As we saw in the quote above – when asked about who should be responsible for *cultural* heritage, the participant replies that we all need to be responsible for being *environmentally* sustainable. This was a common thread. When asked about cultural heritage, many participants raised points about the need to protect our national parks, the Great Barrier Reef and other natural resources, as well as places in nature that have cultural significance, particularly to First Nations peoples. This occurred even though the moderator never explicitly mentioned the environment in relation to heritage. This exchange provides a good example:

Participant: I think there's some historical sites and cultural sites that Australia is recognised for, like the Great Barrier Reef and Sydney Opera House and the Harbour Bridge and Uluru; there's some things that you would ask somebody from another country 'what are some things in Australia?' and they would list those.

Moderator: And so, when you think about something like the Great Barrier Reef – that's a landscape, it's a natural landscape...is that still a part of our cultural heritage, would you think?

Participant: I think so. I think – there's – it's something that people identify with Australia, so that is Australian culture...I think that even natural sites can be a part of our culture because Australia has a very unique landscape.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS TRANS MALE, 22, NT, CAUCASIAN, COVID-19 SCREENER)

Participants also pointed out how blurry the lines between nature and culture can get, especially when seeing arts and culture as part of the visitor or experience economy.

What I can think of, that I would like to be preserved, is a lot of the natural beauty and things like that – because 1. There's historical significance, but also 2. Tourism – it all ties into each other...Uluru and the places – the national parks and things like that; they're all things that I love to visit and go to.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 27, WA, ANGLO, STUDENT)

Seeing environmental heritage as a subcategory of cultural heritage, many participants also felt that governments at different levels had different types of responsibility for these things.

It's hard to say who should be responsible for cultural heritage. I would say the local council is *literally* responsible for these things, but something like the Tamar River is obviously – it's worth preserving, but it's in a state of decay at the moment, and there does need to be some unanimous decisions being made. Because it's split up between so many different councils, there's no proper restoration going into it.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 22, TAS, ANGLO-SAXON, SUPPORT WORKER)

1.3.2 Health

Participants were, as one might imagine in the middle of a global pandemic, quite concerned about health issues – indeed, in later questions, when we asked how participants would feel if the government boosted arts and cultural funding, the most common response was along the lines of, ‘sounds good, so long as they aren’t taking it away from health’.

Just thinking about Covid, for example, I think there’s this idea that we need to put citizens’ health first, before the arts. At the moment, in India, for example, it would just be a bit obscure to build a statue in front of a hospital whilst there’s thousands a day going into hospitals.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, WA, EUROPEAN, STUDENT)

However, most participants felt there was some connection between arts and culture and health, especially in terms of benefits to mental health in the general population. Many participants described the way that engaging with arts and culture – and most commonly, with music – helped them personally, either to change their mood or help them to work through a difficult emotion or experience.

For my generation personally, [arts and culture are] really important, in terms of music especially. I know every day, walking to school, and driving anywhere, listening to music lets out this emotion that you don’t have without the music.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 18, VIC, AUSTRALIAN, YEAR 12 STUDENT)

Dealing with mental health issues as well. I think, at least to me, arts is very much used to express those feelings and things that are maybe harder to convey in a traditional sense. So I think it’s been super useful for society in that way.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 22, VIC, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT)

I feel like people express themselves through art, and I feel like people do that as a mental escape. Cos personally, I dance basically every single day, and if I didn’t have that, I would probably go insane. I think it’s amazing for mental health; people make music to show how they feel, cos they can’t say it. I think there’d be a lot more problems if art just disappeared.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 19, SA, ANGLO-SAXON, STUDENT)

Some participants also made the connection between arts and culture and mental health at a societal level – and the role of government in getting the policy settings right so that society can maximise those benefits.

think what it creates within a community, allowing people to express themselves – even the mental health effects from that – the positive benefits of being part of something and sharing something with other people that you live with or live in the vicinity of, I think is definitely part of government’s role.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 27, SA, ANGLO-SAXON, PHYSIO)

I think, like I said, crime rates would go up and I think that there would be – I think a lot of people rely on stuff like that, and government – I don’t know; a lot of those events are the things that people look forward to, and we’ve sort of seen, with Covid, with events not being able to happen, a lot of people feeling sad and not having anything to look forward to. They’re very withdrawn and suicide rates have gone up. I think having culture and arts engages the community and being engaged in the community gives you a lot of things to look forward to in your calendar, and that’s important for mental health.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS TRANS MALE, 22, NT, CAUCASIAN, COVID-19 SCREENER)

Even if you go to the dentist and there’s pictures on the wall, there doesn’t *need* to be pictures on the wall; the art’s there to – promote wellbeing, mental wellbeing especially. And I think there’s maybe a link between mental wellbeing and happiness and the society you live in and the economy.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, WA, EUROPEAN, STUDENT)

Participants also described how important they felt arts and culture could be in clinical and therapeutic settings. This came across both in terms of how patients can engage directly with arts and cultural activities to improve health outcomes – often coming from participants who worked either in carer or allied health roles – or in terms of the aesthetics used in clinical contexts to affect patients’ experiences less directly.

I work with a lot of people with intellectual disabilities and brain injuries and using music through – whatever music it is they like, whether it’s something they might not be familiar with in terms of classical music or something that is one of their favourite songs now – it creates – it makes it relatable for them and it completely changes their health and wellbeing in a given moment.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 28, ACT, SOUTH-EAST ASIAN, PHYSIO)

You look at hospitals and how they [use arts and culture to] make people feel safer and good about themselves while they’re there. A lot of people are scared, and there’s lots of artwork down the corridors and things like that. I think it works in every space really.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 28, VIC, CAUCASIAN, PROGRAM OFFICER)

1.3.3 Education and children

As was the case with 35–60-year-olds, young middle Australians felt strongly about the impact of arts and culture on educational experiences. This was true for participants with and without children. Discussions typically boiled down to a combination of the benefits for building social skills, learning to think laterally and learning appropriate ways to express emotions. This was exemplified in this exchange in a WA female focus group:

Participant 1: It helps them learn and gives them more of an understanding as to backgrounds of other people.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, WA, AUSTRALIAN, ACCOUNTS OFFICER)

Participant 2: Definitely. Also, building creativity and thinking outside of the box and things like that. Being open minded, I think it helps with that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, WA, AUSTRALIAN/ INDIAN, STUDENT)

Participant 3: Maybe even expressing themselves – how they feel. Children don't have the vocab that we do, so they can't communicate, so maybe they can do that through expressing themselves in a different way.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 22, WA, ASIAN, RECEPTIONIST)

Given the many different cognitive, social, emotional and other benefits children can garner, participants felt that it was important that arts and cultural activities were integrated across the whole curriculum, not just into a siloed 'art class'.

It's definitely [contributing value to] education. I can say that because of the cognitive benefits and the social and emotional benefits for children. Art, in many ways – just to sit doing a painting can allow them to express their emotions – situations that are going on in their home life. But it also – it's not just about developing that cognitive brain activity; it is also *proven* to make them feel better... It's a big part of the curriculum, not just in an art classroom; it's utilised in lots of other subjects, I guess you could say.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, NSW, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT LOOKING FOR WORK)

As that quote and the next two demonstrate, many participants were surprisingly knowledgeable about the research around impacts of arts and culture in education. Often irrespective of age or their own level of education, some participants were able to describe in detail exactly why arts and culture has been found to be so important in schools.

Education is, for me, the biggest one, because education is this phase of secondary socialisation; people are learning who they are and learning to be themselves in society. And so, at this key stage, they need arts and culture to build up that identity and figure out what cultures they fit into and who they identify with.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, TAS, ANGLO-SAXON, YEAR 11 STUDENT)

Skills development, creative development – studies have shown that children who learn music or do visual arts and creativity have better academic outcomes as well because they learn in different ways to children who don't. It's all exposure and skills and development.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, GRAPHIC DESIGNER)

Some participants also raised concerns about how arts and culture's value to education can depend on how well equipped a school is to deliver these activities in the curriculum...

A lot of schools don't have the funding to do whatever arts they might be doing – art classes, studio art, dance classes, any of that kind of stuff. I think that stuff is really important, especially in primary schools, to allow kids to be able to be themselves, not just what the school wants them to be. I think that's important.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, VIC, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT)

...and worried that some schools were doing less arts and cultural activities than in the past, or even removing them entirely, and that this would have detrimental effects on children's development:

I'm actually becoming a primary school teacher, and I was just on placement at a school, and they actually have gotten rid of art as a subject; they've taken art off the curriculum in their school because they've just said, 'it's not important'. So, I'm not sure about that, cos I know people our age – they're more accepting and they want to get into arts more, but people who are younger than us aren't getting taught art as much, which is really weird, because I remember it being pretty important when I was in primary school.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 19, SA, ANGLO-SAXON, STUDENT)

Many also felt that arts and cultural activities, objects and experiences could be valuable learning tools outside the classroom and that this was often the place that young people learned the skills that led to being creative adults.

I think it has a huge effect on skills. Obviously, it depends on what sorts of arts they're getting involved in, but it forces us to think in a different way and allows you to develop your own thoughts and your own thought processes, not just what your teacher or your parents told you. It teaches you to think for yourself – teaches you to work with other people – cos obviously, a lot of artistic endeavours involve not just working alone; and I think it also teaches that things don't always work out. Whenever I did do art, I always stuffed it up. I was always focusing on getting everything right – on my spelling tests or whatever – but when I did – when we had our art classes and things didn't go the way I wanted, I had to learn to deal with that, and I think it teaches you a lot of soft skills as well that are really important to make well-functioning adults.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, SCIENTIST)

Other participants saw a strong relationship between the cultural content you engage with as a child or adolescent, and your ideological, and therefore political, leanings as an adult:

When people go to vote, well, if as kids, when they were watching their favourite TV show or they were engaging with these arts and culture, if that inspires one particular value and that has been shown to them their entire life, then they're going to be much more inspired towards policies and political leanings of that description.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, VIC, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT)

1.3.4

Innovation

Participants were asked whether they were creative in their jobs, and what role they thought creativity played in the workplace. The most common responses centred around creative problem solving and newness – having new ideas, inspiring new ways of thinking or doing things. The focus groups indicated that young middle Australians believe creativity is linked to innovation and leads to new enterprises, new jobs and new industries.

I think creativity, as well, promotes innovation and new things. Like with Star Trek, how they had a lot of high-tech things, just imagining what the future could be like, and we've taken a lot of that and turned it into actual products that we now use. Stuff like Elon Musk and his landing spaceship – that's thinking outside the box, being creative and open.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 23, WA, ANGLO, UNEMPLOYED)

I was just going to make a comment on the fact that creativity, in a way, drives the economy. It's the reason we have new firms, and new markets.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, NSW, ANGLO-SAXON, WOOLWORTHS WORKER)

We deliberately shied away from asking them about the connection between arts and culture and developing creativity in this section, as we wanted to see whether it emerged naturally. Although most participants made an immediate connection between creativity and innovation, both at work and more broadly in society, some also pointed out the connection they saw between being a creative adult and having had arts and cultural experiences as a child. This connection was exemplified in this story from a South Australian scientist:

Like I said earlier, I'm quite involved in the sciences, but when I was a kid, I was never really allowed to get involved in the arts. Mum was always like, 'we can't afford for you to have guitar lessons', so I was never involved in anything artistic as a child, and I do think it does affect the way that I think now. I do struggle more with that lateral thinking that people who have come from a more creative background are just able to do. I have to be more like 'wait – okay – but *this* is the way it works!' and I can't think outside of that box.

And I feel like, as a country, when we – so many inventions and really incredible products and things have been made and developed in Australia, and without that creativity, without someone asking, 'what if we could get the internet to work on a wireless connection?', we wouldn't have Wi Fi. That was something that was just a ridiculous idea twenty or thirty years ago, and cos that one person had a creative thought, Australia developed Wi Fi. I feel like it plays a huge role, and we are a country that has a lot of potential to do a lot and I think having creativity is a huge part of that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, SCIENTIST)

1.3.5 Jobs and economic growth

Young middle Australians were much more comfortable with the idea of arts and culture as parts of the economy than their older counterparts were. Although we will address their perspectives on the cultural and creative industries and how they operate in a later section, it is worth noting here that many felt there was direct value added to economies by arts and cultural activity.

I guess it's a huge part of the economy, like cinemas and restaurants and all the huge events that states put on. It's massive...I guess even their connection to supply, like supply chains, and other - it all links back to other industries. They're linked together...If you mention the fashion industry, there's obviously the design elements, but then there's the manufacturing, they have to have suppliers...So I guess it's all connected.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, SA, ENGLISH/HUNGARIAN, DEFENCE)

One of the key areas, as was mentioned in the previous quote, was the impact of arts and culture on tourism. Arts and culture were seen as drawcards to encourage tourism. Specificity of arts and cultural experiences was seen by participants as a way to make an area distinctive and provide an experience that tourists wouldn't get to have anywhere else in Australia; and this in turn was seen as both a means to stimulate the economy and a way to create jobs.

I think from a regional space, at least where I am, arts and culture is something that brings people to regional areas, and that in turn will impact growth and development of these spaces. Arts and culture brings people together and so for there to be further development in infrastructure or jobs or resources, you need to have more people there and arts and culture is a way to bring more people out to those areas.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 27, VIC, CAUCASIAN, HOMELESS SERVICES)

So I think tourism is a big thing for us in Tasmania as well...I feel like, without some of those things [Mona and Port Arthur], I'm not sure how much the want would be... People come down here to see some of these things and sometimes it's only for that reason.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, TAS, AUSTRALIAN/GERMAN/EGYPTIAN/HUNGARIAN, TEACHER)

A number of participants also specifically referenced the increase in international film studios filming in Australia since Covid-19, highlighting the advantages this had brought to Australia's economy and job market.

With Covid and all of that lovely stuff that happened, it's brought a lot more film and television creation to Australia, which in turn has brought a lot more jobs and a lot more skills required of Australians here. So when you go to make a movie, you don't just need your camera crew and your actors, you need all of the people that make up that industry itself. So you need make-up artists; you need costume designers; you need set designers...And they all lead to more and more people being employed in Australia because we're becoming bigger and better at doing that kind of stuff.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, TEACHER)

1.3.6

Sport, recreation and 'the experience economy'

One strong connection, and again a point of difference from the 35-60-year-olds, was the relationship between arts and culture and other types of experiences such as attending sporting matches. This is possibly because the 18-29-year-olds typically saw the word 'culture' quite differently to their older counterparts, with many pointing out that sport is a part of Australian culture. However, many specifically pointed out how blurry the lines were between these two areas and how incorporating art *into* sport enhanced the experience.

Participant 1: It definitely does [have a connection] in sport. A lot of sports that we play here - have a look at AFL - they have an entire round of the AFL each year where they have their Indigenous round, and they'll have Indigenous artworks on their uniforms, and they'll do the Welcome to Country at the start of the matches and things like that. We have the national anthem that plays. And if we're playing a team from another country, we have their national anthem that plays. So I feel like sport is very cultural. And they display a lot of those cultural arts within sports and things like that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, TEACHER)

Moderator: What do other people think about that?

Participant 2: I agree. Especially when things like the World Cup - I'm a big soccer fan - and the World Cup is, to me, you could define that as a literal cultural activity, experience, whatever word you want to use. Cos it's bringing all these different people from all over the world who have one thing in common: their love for the sport. And I guess also, through different art forms, show and express that love. Some people dress up, some people have posters. Again, the tangible aspect of the art side to that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, FINANCIAL PLANNER)

Participants also described how attending sporting events and arts and cultural events could achieve similar ends. In the following quote, the participant had described 'going to the footy on the weekends' where, 'there's a bit of theatrics that goes on - a bit of fireworks and some arts and cultural elements there', and the moderator asked the participant what he felt made sports events similar to arts and cultural events:

Well, they are performing. And yes, they're competing, which maybe is not an arts and culture element...But yeah, it's about the community, the spectacle, the excitement, the sounds. Everything that I think gives me the same sort of feelings and emotion that I experience when I go to a Fringe show [at the Adelaide Fringe Festival] or when I go

for a drink at Winter Festival down at the beach and there's performers there and fireworks and stuff like that. I think it's the same sort of emotions and feelings that I get from it.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 27, SA, ANGLO-SAXON, ACCOUNTANT)

This also seemed to apply to other types of experiences, with participants referencing science shows, food and beverage festivals and even clubs and volunteering when asked about the kinds of arts and cultural experiences they enjoyed attending.

Music and - if there's something - I go to a lot of comedy gigs and stuff like that, especially if there's something weird. Or food stuff, food festivals - I'm all about that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 27, WA, ANGLO, STUDENT)

I suck at dancing and singing, but I feel like that's expressing creatively as well - just by myself, even though I'm not good at it! But at uni...when I joined all these clubs and volunteering, the community that came with that - I had no idea. That's a big part of my life and I would say that's like a culture of its own.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, SA, TAMIL/ MALAYSIAN, NANNY)

In conclusion:

What is the value of arts and culture to society?

Young middle Australians believe that arts and culture are highly beneficial at a societal level, making strong and enthusiastic connections between arts and culture and a range of ostensibly disconnected policy areas.

They feel that arts and cultural experiences, activities and objects have significant impacts on placemaking and community-building and can help bring local communities together or help build a collective state or national identity. They believe that cultural and environmental heritage are intertwined, and that heritage protection is important for understanding the past and the present, as well as being a gift we can give to future generations. They also believe that young people, in particular, use arts and culture to help them work through mental health concerns, and that this has implications at a societal level.

Young middle Australians are knowledgeable about the benefits of arts and cultural experiences for children and are fierce about protecting children's right to access those benefits in schools, particularly because they could see how their own childhood experiences of arts and culture have affected their capacity to innovate and think laterally as adults. They see a direct link between creativity, innovation and the development of new products and markets. And they feel that arts, cultural and creative industries contribute both directly and indirectly to the economy and help create new jobs, especially connected to tourism and the film industry.

Finally, they believe there are connections between arts and culture and a range of other types of recreational or experiential activities, because every experience is enhanced when arts and cultural elements are incorporated.

Part 1 Q4:

What is the value of arts and culture *to them, personally?*

The young middle Australians who participated in this study believed that they were benefiting, both directly and indirectly, because of the benefits that arts and culture can have on society more broadly. This was irrespective of whether they considered themselves to be 'artsy', liked going to arts and cultural events, had creative pastimes, or considered private consumption of arts and cultural products to be an arts and cultural activity in itself. They recognised that they were engaging with arts and culture on a daily basis both digitally and in other ways, and that their lives were made better by the opportunities to do so.

I work in science; I study in science; that's always been the trajectory I've followed. But arts is still quite important to me. I love listening to music; I love - like I said earlier, I love going to live gigs; I love listening to the radio; I like watching movies. Like [other participant] said, I've never considered myself an artistic person because no matter how hard I try, I can't draw or paint or write a song, but it still is something that's quite important to me - but also something I never really consider, either. I guess cos it's not related to my career and stuff; it's only when you sit and think 'oh, actually, yeah, it does matter a lot'. It is quite a big part of my life without me really putting a lot of thought into it.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, SCIENTIST)

However, many also spoke openly and passionately about the ways they personally engaged with arts and culture, and the benefits they saw from that direct engagement. The connection that participants felt towards their personal cultural engagement became particularly clear when we asked each focus group: 'What would a world without arts and culture look like?' This immediately elicited faces of disgust, disbelief and dismay. Most felt it was an implausible thought experiment.

Yeah, well most of our whole lives have been surrounded by arts and culture. I can't really imagine what it would be like without them.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT)

Some participants made a connection between the idea of a world without arts and culture and the experience of Covid-19 lockdowns.

I would struggle [in a world without any arts and culture]...I go to a lot of music festivals - specifically the music side of arts and culture; and even the past year, with Covid, I noticed a really big difference in my life. Obviously, it didn't *ruin* my life, but not being able to go to those events and express - not only myself, but everyone else around me was doing the same through these music festivals - it hurt. I was quite a different person.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, NSW, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT LOOKING FOR WORK)

Others felt that Covid-19 lockdowns had caused Australians to find new ways to be creative, emphasising that this was *why* a world without arts and culture was impossible.

I don't think that [a world without arts and culture] could happen...In World War One, Aussies were known as the larrikins, and I kind of just feel like, even throughout Covid, there was still a culture of people coming together and banding together, just obviously not in a physical capacity. They did those - one of my colleagues was doing one of these Zoom discos or something... where - everyone - it was like a massive party, but it was in isolation. And there was the 'bin isolating' - yeah.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, NSW, AUSTRALIAN, MEDICAL RECEPTIONIST)

In this section, we explore some of the key ways that young middle Australians feel they benefit from their personal engagement with arts and cultural activities.



Figure 5: 'Bloody Bin Chickens!' Bendigo man Brad McDonald and his kids spent five hours making this costume using old pallets and bin bags. Like hundreds of fellow Australians who dressed up to take their bins out during pandemic lockdowns, the family uploaded footage of their masterpiece to the Facebook group 'Bin Isolation Outing'. [See the video here](#). Source: Brad McDonald.

1.4.1 Giving colour to your life

Participants felt that a world without arts and culture would be 'bland', 'bleak', 'grim', 'boring' and 'sad'. They felt that cultural engagement was essential to prevent us from 'just being like robots'.

Yeah, it's very important. I love going to gigs, I play instruments, I like artwork; it gives you something to do...it gives colour to your life. Without it, we'd just talk about bitcoins, stocks and that's it.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 29, QLD, ENGLISH AUSTRALIAN, YOUTH WORKER)

Can't imagine that would be even possible...Just grey.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, SA, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT)

1.4.2 Giving you a unique identity

One key consequence of a world without arts and culture that came up repeatedly was the idea that our cultural engagement, either as an individual or as a society, is what makes us unique and gives us points of differentiation from others.

You'd have no separation from anyone else, you'd all be the same.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, VIC, AUSTRALIAN, TRADESPERSON)

Pretty bland. Wouldn't be interesting, kind of would be all the same, kind of copies of each other. That's why I think - that's where I think arts and culture's so important, because, you know, it diversifies us, and I think there's something powerful in diversity.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, NSW, MACEDONIAN, PROJECT MANAGEMENT)

I think that a world without arts and culture feels like...if you can't express yourself in a culture, it feels almost like [pause] a terrible society, where you don't actually have freewill [pause] dystopian, that's the word I wanted. It feels almost dystopian because people don't have the freedom or self-insight to express themselves. So I think without expression, socially, you are not anything. So, either it would be a world of robots, or it would be a world of people who... don't connect at all. There's no group activity if there's no arts and culture, in my mind.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, TAS, ANGLO-SAXON, YEAR 11 STUDENT)

1.4.3

Helping connect you to culture – yours and other people's

For participants who had identified as having a culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD) background, ethnic culture and the artforms that accompanied their family's culture were often highly valued, and again demonstrated how engagement with arts and culture was 'intertwined' with other aspects of life.

Culture and arts to me is pretty important. My background is Macedonian, so that's been really important in shaping how I see the outside world, and you know, my morals and stuff like that – and that's where culture kind of comes in. And learning the Macedonian culture, and being Australian born, it's very intertwined with dancing and music. That's something I've grown up with, so, yeah, it's very...very important in, kind of, forming societal values and stuff like that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, NSW, MACEDONIAN, PROJECT MANAGEMENT)

Many of the non-CALD participants, although emphasising that they put high value on their interactions with the arts, often described themselves and their backgrounds as being 'devoid of culture'. This was often a lament, with participants explaining their belief that Australians (typically referring to Australians with Anglo-Celtic backgrounds) don't have a culture to speak of, and that this was something they envied about Australians with non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds.¹⁹

Yeah, I think for me, for my lifestyle and where I'm from, culture isn't a very big thing, it's not much happening – the old joke of white people having no culture and that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 21, NSW, AUSTRALIAN, SELF-EMPLOYED)

I know nothing about my culture and I kind of wish that – my dad taught me little things, but I wish that I knew it and practised it.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, NSW, AUSTRALIAN, MEDICAL RECEPTIONIST)

However, even when they didn't feel strongly connected to their own cultures, they typically felt that it was very important to engage with other cultures, and that one of the best ways to do this was by engaging with the art of other cultures.

I feel like everyone would be even more isolated, especially in a cultural sense, in our generation and the generations to come, if they didn't know about other cultures and interacting with people from other cultures and things like that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, FINANCIAL PLANNER)

1.4.4

Making you feel good

For many, arts and cultural activities were tools they could use to help them feel better about the world, lift their mood, connect them to others and deal with problems. So the idea of a world without arts and culture elicited images of social isolation and loneliness.

I think it would feel quite isolated and lonely. I guess, again, for me, culture is community and experience. And without that, I don't think you'd be able to express creativity at all without some form of art or culture. So I think it would be a very lonely, sad place.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, ETHICS OFFICER)

The first word that came into my mind was, it would be kind of sad. Even though I do engineering, I feel like I'm still quite a creative person and I like doing art and reading or doing sport. That's bringing people together, so, when you don't really have that, no matter what form it's in – bringing people together – it's a bit lonely and a bit sad and the world isn't as colourful or vibrant in various ways.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, SA, TAMIL-MALAYSIAN, NANNY)

1.4.5 Giving you something to do and connecting you with others

While at a societal level, participants often discussed bigger, more philosophical ideas about value, on a personal level – for some, at least – the benefits came from having a variety of activities with which to engage and a range of interesting ways to spend their free time.

Growing up, in most of my spare time, I spent it doing musical theatre, all through my schooling... it feels like all my best memories are of time doing that, and it's because the *collective* creation of something that is art – it builds the *best* memories. It's such a great experience – not because *dancing* is great, or *acting* is great. It's because of the teamwork and collaboration and I think that there's a real enjoyment that comes from that...So, I think it has a lot of emotional connotation to me, that it's quite important to me and I think it's very valuable.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, TAS, ANGLO-SAXON, YEAR 11 STUDENT)

Yeah, very important, love going to gigs, I play instruments, I like artwork – it gives you something to do. The amount of cool pop festivals and science things that are on – science isn't really an art, but – it all gives colour to your life, it's entertainment.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 29, QLD, ENGLISH AUSTRALIAN, YOUTH WORKER)

It's something to do and not sit around the house and the social aspect of it, really, to catch up with friends, to go on a date, whatever it might be.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 28, VIC, CAUCASIAN, PROGRAM OFFICER)

It's definitely enriching...these days I'm creating a lot of music and I've got a lot of friends that are very musical and it's just a whole lot of fun getting together and not just talking and whatever other people do. And just creating something with them, it's great. So, that's definitely a real connection.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 22, TAS, ANGLO-SAXON, SUPPORT WORKER)

1.4.6 Knock-on effects: Stuff you don't even know it's giving you

And finally, a number of participants pointed out that arts and cultural objects, activities and experiences frequently catalyse other things in the world. One participant talked about Star Trek and how today's tech giants often draw inspiration from 1980s sci-fi. Another talked about how often movies are based on books or plays, and then the movie lines become memes, and before you know it, people are just saying these things all the time, without anyone even knowing where the saying came from anymore. A number mentioned how famous visual artworks often inspire design trends, which we then end up incorporating into our clothes or our homes.

And you also don't know what things – like music or art or theatre – what that's inspired that's *not* necessarily – that you *wouldn't* necessarily put in the bubble of 'art'. Art's inspired a whole lot of random stuff, so if you were to take all of the artsy people out of the world – yeah; we'd be doomed.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, ADMINISTRATION)

In conclusion: What is the value of arts and culture to them, personally?

Young middle Australians are aware that they, personally, reap the benefits of a rich cultural life at a societal level and feel that their direct engagement with arts and cultural activities also benefits them as individuals. They find it difficult to imagine a world without arts and culture, but when they try, it gives them images of a sad, grey, dystopian world full of identical robots with no free will. They feel that arts and culture give their lives colour, give them the means to create and express identity, and help them make meaningful connections to other people. They use arts and cultural activities to lift their mood, bring them joy, chill them out, pump them up and ultimately, just give them something interesting to do with their time. And they are aware that, despite all those positives, there are sure to be other benefits that they are receiving, all the time, without even knowing that arts and culture have made them possible.

Part 1 Q5: How do the cultural and creative industries work?

In this section, we wanted to understand how much participants knew about the cultural and creative industries. Were they familiar with these terms? Did they think of arts and culture in terms of industry and jobs? Did they know how arts, cultural and creative businesses supported themselves? These questions were asked, in part, because 35-60-year-olds had typically been unfamiliar with these ideas. We wondered whether younger people, who may have been presented with a range of career types while at school, would have a greater understanding.

1.5.1

Do the arts, cultural and creative industries contribute much to the economy?

The term creative industries had about as much familiarity to this cohort as it did to the middle Australians in last year's study. There were some tentative suggestions in some groups about the music industry and the film industry, but little certainty. Participants were then offered a definition: 'Creative industries are industries that are inherently reliant on individual human creativity for their success. They include industries such as broadcasting, design, fashion, film and television, galleries and museums, literature, music, theatre and other performing arts, and visual arts.'

Participants were then asked, 'Thinking about all those things, do you think the combined creative industries contribute much to the economy?'. Follow-up prompt questions included 'How much?', 'In what ways?', and 'Do you imagine they are very profitable?'.

Profitability

Many participants seemed surprised by this question; most considered it a given that the cultural and creative industries were profitable.

Oh for sure, otherwise they wouldn't be able to keep going, if they didn't make any profit off it or anything.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, VIC, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT)

This initial reaction was generally then countered by other participants bringing up the effects of Covid-19 lockdowns. Most groups eventually came to a consensus that under normal circumstances, arts and cultural businesses 'do pretty well for themselves', but that the current unusual economic environment had caused a lot of difficulty for these kinds of organisations. Most, though not all, felt that the government should support these creative businesses because it was essential that they survive the pandemic for the good of society, as illustrated in this exchange between the female Queenslanders.

Participant 1: [Because of Covid-19 lockdowns] we've got so, so many children coming up in the current generation that just don't have the same exposure as, say, people in our generation and older did. Their exposure is so different because they are accessing it online and things like that. There's not the same opportunity to go and see a play on a Friday night or something like that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, TEACHER)

Participant 2: Yeah. And I think it takes away a safe space for a lot of people. Arts and culture really is about having that community...Cutting that out would remove that safe space for people, that community.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, HOSPITALITY)

Some participants pointed out that while the creative industries and the activities or goods they produce may not be hugely profitable, that was okay because you don't get involved in that kind of work for money anyway.

I know quite a few people who run music events and stuff...They do some of the bigger ones. They do all right, but not fantastically well. They get by and certainly enough to keep doing what they're doing because they love it, but I would say it's more - at least for me, there's easier ways to get more money than doing - organising those types of things. Yeah, you do it cos you love it and then money is - maybe not secondary, but it's certainly not the only thing.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 27, WA, ANGLO, STUDENT)

Contributions to the economy

Most participants focused more on the idea of the profitability (and losses) of specific businesses and/or individual creators - the idea of profitability was offered predominantly as a prompt from the moderator to groups that were unsure about questions of economic contribution ('I don't really know anything about how the economy works, hey').²⁰ Some did think in terms of contributions to the economy, and these participants were split between those who thought the contributions were very large, due to the popularity of the goods and services being produced...

I would say it's quite a big contribution because, once you're working, as soon as you start getting surplus income, the majority of people like to spend it, and the creative industries are behind the products that we are buying with our surplus income, be it new clothes; stuff for your house cos you want to make your house look a bit different or, anything like that. The creative industries are coming up with that and coming up with the marketing to tempt us to purchase their products, so I guess from the economy's point of view, it's probably quite a major player in getting the money moving around the economy.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 26, WA, ANGLO-NEW ZEALANDER, WELDER)

I guess that's where our disposable income goes. Any extra money that we have, we tend to spend on culture and arts. So I guess it's a huge part of the economy, like cinemas and restaurants and all the huge events that states put on. It's massive.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, SA, ENGLISH-HUNGARIAN, DEFENCE)

...and those who felt that contributing to the economy isn't the point of arts and culture anyway, irrespective of their views on how large the economic contribution may have been:

I think that, yes, they do add a huge amount of economic value, but I also get a bit hesitant when we talk about them as economic value because I don't think that's their inherent value. And it shouldn't be brought down to a number if that makes sense. They have this huge value to who we are as people and how we relate to each other, and that to me is a higher priority than the economic value.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, NT, ANGLO, PROJECT OFFICER)

I guess this is one thing where you could draw a distinction between immediate impacts and longer-term effects. The immediate impact may not be seen for quite some time, and that can potentially lead to a society where people undervalue art because it may not be immediately profitable. I guess it's that cliché of how a famous artist may not make all their money until after they're long dead. It can take a long time for a particular artwork to get that type of appreciation. So, if you have a short-term society, that type of legacy – well, it may never become a legacy because that art may never be produced...If you have a long-term society that realises the benefits of prudence and patience, then the art and culture can be enhanced cos they may recognise 'hey; this stuff is going to set us apart'.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 24, SA, CAUCASIAN, RECORDS OFFICER)

Others hastened to point out that contributions to the economy could be both direct and indirect, in terms of the productivity of individuals as well as spill-over effects from cultural and creative industries into other industries:

Then there'd be the indirect ways it benefits the economy as well. Going back to music again, for me, the music itself, and the production and the sales are maybe not going to help the economy broadly, but they're sure as sh*t going to help me stay productive in a job I'm not too fond of for the next eight hours.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 25, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, STUDENT)

I think people just think of the numbers side of it; they don't think of the innovation side of it. Architecture, for example: architecture's used to incorporate space. Whether that be in the CBD, for example – if you didn't have well-designed buildings, it wouldn't all flow together. I think that's a form of art in itself, and I think just because you're not getting that direct revenue from it or that immediate benefit, people overlook it. And I guess that's reinforced at the moment with all the policy changes making culture and arts degrees a lot more expensive. I think that plays into that.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 22, SA, GREEK/ CYPRIOT ETHNICITY, DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE)

1.5.2

How do arts, cultural and creative businesses operate financially?

Across the board, there was an initial belief from most participants that arts and cultural businesses and organisations supported themselves through the sale of goods and services; however, this belief was immediately destabilised by the fact that the question had been asked. Participants often described having always assumed that earned income was the predominant business model, but then realised they'd never really thought about it, and now that they *were* thinking about it, they didn't really know.

I think some are quite profitable and some are a bit harder, based – in terms of the industries they're in. Yeah, it's a bit hard to decipher though.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 20, QLD, GERMAN AUSTRALIAN, COLES RETAIL)

Discussions of the Covid-19 economic situation typically provided an opening for the moderator to ask whether and how creative organisations and businesses that were struggling managed to survive, both during and prior to the pandemic. This evoked a more nuanced discussion of operating models in arts and culture, with responses spanning the range of different operating models in these industries, including:

- Earned income, including through digital monetisation

Sometimes the funding comes from a little side thing which they know will make more money. Like, you see YouTubers making a lot more money from merchandising than from their videos themselves, and they will plug their merch a lot because they are like, 'well, this is how I'm going to make money; if lots of people buy my jumpers, which have a huge profit margin, then that's what I've got'.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, TAS, ANGLO-SAXON, YEAR 11 STUDENT)

I think for many artists, unless they can do something like Twitch stream²¹ their art or something – unless they can find some way to monetise, in a way, to help generate extra funds...I think you've got this huge lag-time between the amount of time it takes to create a piece of art... and the eventual pay-off, if it ever happens.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 24, SA, CAUCASIAN, RECORDS OFFICER)

- Organised philanthropy

Perhaps there's some wealthy philanthropist who decides 'hey, I think that this is important, it was important to me as a child so I'm going to put in the money'. That's less usual, but it happens.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, TAS, ANGLO-SAXON, YEAR 11 STUDENT)

- Corporate sponsorship

I think sometimes companies and corporates like to help sponsor these things. Put their name on it and it doesn't cost them that much in comparison to things.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 23, WA, ANGLO, UNEMPLOYED)

- Crowdfunding

There's also crowdfunding; Patreon and Kick-Start and stuff is the same idea of donors and patrons and that sort of stuff, but on a smaller scale. Rather than having one very rich person give you a living wage, you get a hundred not-so-rich people to give you a little bit because they like what you're creating. And so they're supporting you there.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, GRAPHIC DESIGNER)

- Self-funding

I've seen groups being funded by – where the person running it worked somewhere else, and that's how they had the money then to fund this. So, they are simultaneously earning the money to fund this thing which won't make money but is going to be a good thing to do.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, TAS, ANGLO-SAXON, YEAR 11 STUDENT)

- Volunteering

See, from a cultural aspect, a lot of these things would actually be voluntary. Therefore, there's no money going home with anyone, and a lot of them are not-for-profit kinds of things, sideline businesses...Festivals, for instance, like the Falls Festival – I think 80% of their staff are volunteers. They just get paid the ticket to go in there for the whole weekend.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 26, TAS, AUSTRALIAN, STAY-AT-HOME MUM/ PART-TIME CLEANER)

- Government support

Yeah, I think there's a lot of money that goes into these big galleries to be able to put on these huge exhibitions, and to be honest I'm not that familiar with how – what kind of money comes from the government in terms of funding that and what the gallery puts together for that. But I feel like a lot more money goes into the bigger institutions of art and less into the more community-based art: the local arts centres that put together small productions of things.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 28, ACT, SOUTH-EAST ASIAN, PHYSIO)

1.5.3 The advantages and disadvantages of government boosts or cuts to arts and culture funding

In groups where government funding was not raised by participants, the moderator asked the question directly: 'Do governments provide financial support to arts and culture?' Most participants did then identify that they were aware of examples of government grants or other forms of financial support from the various levels of government for arts and culture. We then posed two hypothetical scenarios for participants. First, if a government announced that they were going to be boosting spending on arts and culture, what would participants think the advantages and disadvantages of that might be?

Advantages of governments boosting arts and cultural spending

The advantages that participants identified fell into four main categories (in order of frequency in the discussions): stimulating economic activity, social cohesion, sustaining arts and cultural activity and improving accessibility.

In terms of economic benefits, participants felt that stimulating arts and culture could also stimulate other areas of the economy.

I think with boosting or putting more money into the arts, you know, whether that's opening up more industries or allowing more live performances to be happening, it boosts other hospitality sectors and it boosts all the hotels and accommodation and all those sorts of things. So if it's money put in to try and boost, you know, more jobs as [other participant] said, to put more money to a greater area rather than just boosting arts, I see it making sense. But yeah, it depends on circumstances.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 28, NSW, ANGLO-SAXON, TEACHER)

Another advantage brought up by many participants was the opportunity to stimulate communities and maximise the benefits wrought by strong social cohesion.

There's probably some unseen flow-on effects. I think what it creates within a community, allowing people to express themselves – even the mental health effects from that – the positive benefits of being part of something and sharing something with other people that you live with or live in the vicinity of, I think, is definitely part of government's role. We're trying to create not just a society where people purely live, but actually enjoy themselves. Yeah, I think funding creative arts and things is really important.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 27, SA, ANGLO-SAXON, PHYSIO)

Some participants also raised the point that boosting government spending helps sustain aspects of arts and cultural activity that benefit Australia's policy priorities, such as building a national identity:

Art and culture's not something I think of so much in relation to the government. When I'm thinking about what the government does – it feels like more regulating industries, sort of thing. But, programs – like channels – the ABC have mandated amounts of contents they have to produce in Australia, and I think if the government – because I think it can be expensive – than just purchasing a program that already exists – having to create new programming is expensive, so when the government mandates that, you get things like Bluey, which is a very popular show, which I haven't watched but is on my radar because it is such a popular show everywhere, and that's – that sort of stuff, which is very definitely art, wouldn't exist without the government mandating a certain percentage of ABC being Australian content.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 25, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, DATA ANALYST)



Figure 6: Australian animated kids TV show 'Bluey' is produced in Queensland, set in Brisbane, and focuses on themes of family, growing up and Australian culture. Image source: PR handout image via the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1/4/2020.

The other area that participants brought up as an advantage to government spending on arts and culture was that governments can make certain activities accessible to the public when they wouldn't otherwise be. This quote was a response to the question of why government funding could be valuable for arts and cultural venues and events.

I literally went to an art gallery yesterday. Being able - also they're free. I walked in and said, 'Where can I buy a ticket?' He said, 'No, it's free'. Things like that. Me, being someone that's willing and able to buy a ticket - but the next person might not be. And that might stop them from going to certain events and things like that.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 24, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, FINANCIAL PLANNER)

Disadvantages of governments boosting arts and cultural spending

The key downside that participants identified of boosting spending on arts and culture was that the money would then be displaced from funding other things. Most were not adamant that this was a bad thing (though some were), but most wanted to know where the money was coming from and that it wasn't coming from somewhere they personally valued more highly - usually health, and especially Covid-19 vaccine development or treatments - before they'd be willing to back a funding boost to arts and culture.

I think as long as it's not - arts and culture is super important, but I think you'd have to look at it as a bigger picture, as well as, is that taking money from elsewhere? If there's another sector that super needs it - but I think it would be really good to boost...because I know a lot of times something is boosted and something else is cut. So I think it's something that you'd - as long as it wasn't being taken out of something else that really needed it.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 22, NT, ANGLO, PROJECT OFFICER)

Yeah, I would prefer if they put it into science rather than arts and culture, because, for example, in labs - funding labs that could find a better vaccine for Covid or other diseases and things like that, and I don't think art and culture is as important as the health - physical health - I do understand that arts and culture helps with the mental health for a lot of people out there, but I also think that physical health is more important, personally.
(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 20, WA, AUSTRALIAN/INDIAN, STUDENT)

Many participants pointed out that although they supported the idea of boosting spending on arts and culture in principle, they didn't feel that existing arts and cultural funding always found its way to the places they felt it should be going, as exemplified by this exchange in the ACT male group:

Participant 1: So, if the government was announcing and was going to be implementing – giving a whole bunch of money into the arts, I would just hope that it would be accessible to people who actually work there. Real people. And engaging – I would hope that the government would be engaging with people in that industry to work out where it is – not just the people who work at the top of the industry in the high-level, expensive stuff – people actually at the community level as well.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 28, ACT, SOUTH-EAST ASIAN, PHYSIO)

Participant 2: Yeah, I think it's really, really important that there's some kind of accountability around where that money goes, cos I've completely lost any semblance of excitement when there's an announcement about funding to the arts or mental health. Because it doesn't seem to pan out in a way where it affects the people who it should be helping.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 29, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, PUBLIC SERVANT)

Advantages of governments cutting arts and cultural spending

Next, participants were asked, 'If a government announced that they were going to be *cutting* funding to arts and culture, what do you feel would be the advantages and disadvantages of *that*?'

The main advantage participants saw to cutting cultural spending was, predictably, the same as the disadvantages of boosting cultural spending – it would allow funds to be reallocated elsewhere.

If it's going to something good like healthcare, it's good. But, like, depends how much they cut, I guess.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 20, QLD, ITALIAN/AUSTRALIAN/ENGLISH, MENU COORDINATOR)

A small number of participants also pointed out that they believed in 'small government' and that consequently, they did not believe arts and culture should be the responsibility of governments.

I think I'd be pretty happy because that money can now go towards erasing some deficit or erasing the money that we owe to other countries or to lowering the taxes and money which I then have to pay, and you guys then have to pay, to the government.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 18, VIC, AUSTRALIAN, STUDENT)

That said, the most common answer to this question, across most of the focus groups, was essentially, 'it depends': 'it depends on why it's needed elsewhere', 'it depends on where it would be going instead', 'it depends how much they were going to take', 'it depends on whether they were planning to put it back'. Participants were hesitant to endorse cuts as they felt those cuts would likely be permanent, while overall, their answers were context specific. In the middle of a global pandemic, it seemed fair for many participants to reallocate some funding to healthcare, but once the pandemic was over, most participants wanted to see those cuts rectified, 'for the good of the community'.

Disadvantages of governments cutting arts and cultural spending

Interestingly, although there had been significant hesitation from some participants about whether *boosting* funding was a good idea, the idea of *cutting* funding was met with dismay, sometimes even by the same participants. These disadvantages fell into three major themes:

1. The negative flow-on effects for individuals and communities

It's a tough one, because it's like - well, you can cut arts or cultural events or funding, but then you might get an increased demand for funding for mental health...so there's that: you [governments] could be potentially making the problem worse or making it harder for yourself.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 22, ACT, ANGLO-SAXON, STUDYING/DISABILITY SUPPORT WORKER)

I think there would be one major effect: the loss of identity of certain communities. When I think of Freo, for example - there's these big containers - that's my image of Freo; that's what I associate Freo with being...losing that sense of identity would have long-term effects.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS MALE, 19, WA, EUROPEAN, STUDENT)

2. Concerns that the arts and culture that *did* get funded after the cuts would be more geared towards other people and would no longer reflect young people's interests or experiences
3. The negative effects on creators and their livelihoods (and the negative effects on the community as a consequence)

I don't really see what the positives [to cutting spending] would be...overall, I think arts and culture is something that is seen as more important by younger people than older people - I guess this is just based on what I see happen on Facebook comments and things like that, but - I feel like it would be something that would cause quite a bit of anger and frustration. Even though, like I've said, I enjoy live gigs and stuff, but I'm not involved in the arts world at all. But it's still something that myself and my friends would be most unhappy about.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, SA, ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN, SCIENTIST)

I kind of feel like the exposure is already limited so much more than what it used to be [because of Covid-19] that it would be really upsetting to a lot of people if it was cut even further. Cos if you're going to cut something, at the end of the day, you're going to have people [creators] that just look at it and go, 'I can't do this anymore. I can't produce this anymore. I can't continue to do this without the funding that I used to get'.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 29, QLD, AUSTRALIAN, TEACHER)




Figure 7: Marcus Canning's sculpture *Rainbow* at the Fremantle port is made of nine shipping containers. Image source: Photo 146001570 / Fremantle Rainbow © Marco Taliani De Marchio

In conclusion: How do the cultural and creative industries work?

Young middle Australians typically don't know much about how arts and culture work from a business or operational perspective - it generally isn't something they've ever really thought about. They assume, given the value they personally place on these activities, that arts and cultural organisations and businesses must be financially viable and probably make contributions to the economy, but also believe that money isn't really the point of this kind of activity anyway. When prompted, young middle Australians can list a range of ways that arts and cultural organisations generate income, including self-funding, crowdfunding, sales of goods and services, monetising their process as well as their products, organised philanthropy, corporate sponsorship, relying on volunteers and government support.

Young middle Australians are cautiously enthusiastic about the idea of boosts to arts and cultural funding from governments, so long as the money wouldn't be coming from health and would be going to creative activities of optimal benefit to society - mostly they wish to see greater investment in community-level arts and cultural experiences. Some are adamant that arts and cultural organisations need government support now more than ever, thanks to Covid-19. Others feel it would be reasonable if the government needed to temporarily reduce funding to arts and culture to support emergency Covid-19 preventions or treatments, but would want reassurance that the funding would be returned, post-pandemic. But they also feel that if cuts were made to government spending on arts and culture, there would be a range of flow-on effects that would probably end up costing the government - and Australian society - more in the long run.





Comparing generational perceptions of arts and culture

Theme	Young middle Australians (18-29 years old)	Middle Australians (35-60 years old)	Divergent versus aligned views
Life without arts and culture	Drab; grim; grey; there'd be no differences between people, we'd all be the same; boring; people would be more isolated. There'd be no more self-expression or diversity.	Bleak; dull; colourless; like a war-torn country; boring; a more divided community; no innovation; people would be more isolated.	D ----- A 
Arts and culture & community and social cohesion	Arts and culture bring people together and really drive that community connectedness. That's what arts and culture are about, for some. Arts and cultural activities are often how they make friends, and build a sense of belonging.	Arts and culture bring the community together - that's what arts and culture are for; they give us opportunities to be with friends and families; unite people from all walks of life and help us understand each other.	D ----- A 
Arts and culture & children's development	Funding creativity and arts in schools is really important to help children work out who they are and shape them into who they can be. They need broad exposure because not every art form will resonate with every person. And it's usually fun, so it helps them learn and develop their brains. There are cognitive, social and emotional benefits. Also really important for children to have exposure to lots of different cultures and cultural histories.	Essential to children's development; gives children a constructive way to express themselves; helps neural pathways develop; helps kids build resilience and other social skills.	D ----- A 
Arts and culture & Australian identity	The arts and culture you engage with shapes your identity as an individual, and the arts and culture available in a country (both to residents and what people can see of a nation from the outside) shapes the nation's identity. So we need more of that so we're shaping our identity more, setting ourselves apart. It's also about reframing and being honest about our past - especially our colonial past and our ongoing relations with our First Nations peoples - and about what a contemporary Australian identity is or even could be. Arts and culture can be a vehicle for updating that identity to include diverse voices.	Arts and culture help us tell our own stories to ourselves and each other, as well as to the world more broadly, so they are essential for building our national identity. Content needs to reflect our diverse voices.	D ----- A 
Arts and culture & creativity and innovation	Creativity runs through everything, and the more chances you have to think creatively by engaging with the arts, the better you get at thinking creatively in all the other aspects of your life. With creativity comes innovation. But arts and culture aren't always about creativity. If you're doing things the way they've always been done and not thinking about it much, that's not creative, even if you're doing something considered an artform (e.g. singing, if it's singing the national anthem at school). Both active participation and passive consumption can elicit imagination and internal stimulation.	Arts and culture stimulate creativity and broaden your mind. The experiences stay with you and inspire innovation in other areas of your life, not just when you're directly participating in arts and culture.	D ----- A 

Comparing generational perceptions of arts and culture (continued)

Theme	Young middle Australians (18–29 years old)	Middle Australians (35–60 years old)	Divergent versus aligned views
Perceptions of public spending on arts and culture	Often weren't aware of government funding for arts and culture but felt that it would be good if it was more community-driven. If arts and culture were getting a boost in government funding, they'd think that was good but would want to know where that money was being taken from and make sure there was a balance. And if there were cuts, they'd want to be sure it was going somewhere necessary, because cutting arts and culture is devastating for communities and has a range of negative flow-on effects.	Felt that it was obvious that people want the government to fund community-building, opportunities for children to develop, and things that make people think more and feel more – and agreed that that's what arts and culture actually is a lot of the time. But when it's traditional high arts, often felt, 'But what about health? What about schools? Where else could that money be going?'	
Arts and culture as a public good	All artforms are valuable for society, even the ones that don't interest an individual personally, because everyone learns in different ways, and you don't always know what's going to click with you until you see it.	Arts and culture should be for social benefit; should be accessible to all regardless of income; should exist in many forms, even in the forms that don't interest them specifically, for the benefit of society.	
The role of Indigenous arts and culture	Integral to the Australian story; should receive more attention in Australia and across the world. It's the thing that actually makes Australian arts and culture most unique. We're getting better at keeping Indigenous stories alive, but we need to do more.	Helps non-Indigenous Australians understand Indigenous cultures; Indigenous culture is good for tourism and Australia's reputation abroad; valuable but under-appreciated.	
What does each cohort think are the differences in other generations' perceptions of arts and culture?	18–29-year-olds think that older generations don't engage very much with arts and culture, and don't rely on it as much as they (younger Australians) do, especially for their mental health. They feel that older generations can't access as many arts and cultural experiences as quickly because they are not as comfortable in digital spaces. Despite that, the 18–29-year-olds think that older generations do value arts and culture as highly, they just don't have the opportunities to engage as readily.	35–60-year-olds think that younger generations have a broader definition of arts and culture that includes activities that they (the 35–60-year-olds) believe are just mindless entertainment or time wasters. They are comfortable with others having a different definition to theirs though.	
Perceptions of cultural heritage	Cultural heritage is about anything we do now that will have an impact on future generations, including preserving the environment, preserving traditions and heritage sites, but also encouraging creative innovation, placemaking and continual improvement for the benefit of future generations. Cultural heritage is also seen as good for tourism and has economic value. Older participants (i.e. Gen Y, 26–29 year olds) and participants with children had a much greater interest in this topic. Cultural heritage icons that commonly came to mind included Uluru, the Great Barrier Reef and the Sydney Opera House.	Cultural heritage was a topic that held the interest of this cohort more than it did their younger counterparts. The cultural heritage that is deliberately preserved in Australia should reflect Australia's identity, incorporating the nation's diversity and passing those diverse stories on to future generations. Cultural heritage icons that commonly came to mind included Uluru, the Great Barrier Reef and the Sydney Opera House.	

Comparing generational perceptions of arts and culture (continued)

Theme	Young middle Australians (18–29 years old)	Middle Australians (35–60 years old)	Divergent versus aligned views
Perceptions of 'commercial' arts and culture	The perception is that pre-Covid-19, most arts and cultural activities were able to support themselves commercially. But Covid-19 lockdowns made that difficult or impossible, which they feel is a real problem. They think it's good when arts and cultural organisations/individuals are self-sufficient, and they also feel that governments should step in when they're not able to be self-sufficient, for the good of society.	If it's for profit-making, rather than expression or challenging the status quo, that's not arts and culture, that's just mindless entertainment. Most did not include commercial art galleries, commercial radio or big budget Hollywood movies in the category of 'arts and culture'.	
Definitions of arts and culture	'Arts and culture' as a collective term is not naturally used to encompass a single idea by this cohort, though they do feel that the two ideas ('arts' and 'culture') are inextricably linked. Arts create culture, and arts are an expression of culture – you can't have one without the other – but they do stand alone. Culture elicited three ideas – multiculturalism, subcultures, and high culture or being a cultured person, in that order.	'Arts and culture' as a collective term is a broader, more inclusive term than 'arts' or 'culture' alone, and refers to activities that inspire, stimulate your imagination and challenge existing perceptions. The activities included in 'arts and culture' are broad and also flexible – middle Australians were comfortable with the idea that other people included different activities to them.	
Definitions of participation and consumption in arts and culture	Participation in arts and culture means you are actively doing something yourself. Participation can include building on something someone else has done (e.g. if you livestream yourself playing a video game, you are participating, in that you are building a new thing with an existing thing, but just playing the game on your own is not participation; it's consumption).	Participation in arts and culture included attending performances, visiting venues etc. The line between participation and consumption was blurry, but most participants felt that consumption wasn't the same as participation if you were doing it alone (e.g. listening to the radio in your car or watching TV alone). Group involvement was an important criterion.	
Perceptions of 'high arts'	'Sure, I'd give anything a go once – if someone gave me a free ticket, sure'.	'Not for people like me'; 'for more of an exclusive crowd'.	
Digital engagement with arts and culture	Gen Y and Z communicate differently than Gen X and Boomers, including through arts and culture. Digital is integrated with everything, including face to face. Digital engagement means much greater exposure to other cultures and subcultures from a very young age, and that niche interests can be cultivated. Most participants described digital engagement as just a normal part of the experience of arts and culture and life more broadly. With digital engagement comes expanded and immediate accessibility to a wider range of ideas.	Most participants did not include digital activities such as YouTube or TikTok videos, or video/mobile phone games etc. in their definition of arts and cultural activities. Most described these activities as mindless, a waste of time or just for fun. However, they also believed that younger generations would see these digital activities as arts and culture. Since this was pre-Covid-19, it is unsurprising that online engagement with museums, live streaming of events etc. were not mentioned.	

Summary of key findings

Young middle Australians think:

Finding 1

Arts and culture are embedded in and inseparable from everyday life, partly because digital and physical experiences are so thoroughly intertwined. It is impossible for them to imagine a world without arts and culture as they access these experiences constantly. Any approach that treats arts and culture as separate, or 'add-ons' to daily life, will not make sense to this cohort.

Finding 2

The stigma that some Australians attach to high arts is largely absent. They are as keen to engage with traditional 'high arts' as they are to engage with any other kind of arts and cultural experience, as long as those experiences are accessible and the stories they tell feel relevant.

Finding 3

Australia's arts and cultural content should reflect the diversity of our population, and the stories of our First Nations peoples. This cohort believes arts and culture help deepen Australians' understanding of different people and perspectives, and also help tell Australia's diverse range of stories to international audiences.

Finding 4

Arts and culture are community-building tools that help mitigate loneliness and social isolation. Consequently, this cohort believes politicians and governments have a critical role to play in supporting cultural and creative organisations and industries.

Finding 5

Childhood interactions with arts and culture influence creative thinking in adulthood, as well as innovation outcomes in the workplace and in society more broadly. However, they worry that the cognitive, social and emotional benefits are decreased when schools are poorly equipped or choose to reduce the time spent on arts and culture in the classroom.

Part 2: Discussion & implications

In this section:

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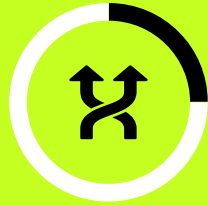
About Australian Young People



43% of 20-24-year-olds and **17%** of 25-29-year-olds live in their family home.²²

Approximately **3.2 million** 15-24-year-olds lived in Australia in 2020, constituting around **12%** of the population. This has steadily declined from **17%** in 1971 but is now expected to stabilise.²³

Around **1%** of 12-24-year-olds were homeless on Census night 2016.²⁴



In 2011, **25%** of 12-24-year-olds in Australia were from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.²⁵

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people made up **5.1%** of the young person population in 2019, compared to the national average of **3.3%**.²⁶



46% of 18-24-year-olds are overweight or obese.²⁷

Today's 20-year-olds can expect to live almost a **decade** longer than their parents.²⁸

The **leading** causes of ill health and premature death in 15-24-year-old males is self-harm/suicide and alcohol use disorders. For females, it is anxiety and depressive disorders.²⁹

Close to **10%** of 15-24-year-olds live with a disability.³⁰



In 2018, just over **80%** of 20-24-year-olds had either completed year 12 or equivalent or held a Certificate III level or above. This was highest in major cities at **91%** and lowest in remote and very remote locations at **67.7%**.³¹

In 2016, **60%** of 22-year-olds had attended (but not necessarily graduated from) university, compared to **53%** in 2011.³²

Between 2003 and 2015, the proportion of Australian 15-year-olds who expected they would go to university declined from 63% to **54%**.³³



57% of 15-24-year-olds work part time, and 20% work as casuals.³⁴

16% of 15-24-year-olds do volunteer work, and this figure is growing.³⁵

18-34-year-olds make up **53%** of the gig workforce.³⁶

A quarter of Australians under 30 work multiple jobs.³⁷

In September 2020 in Australia, average unemployment among 15-34-year-olds was around **11%**. Average unemployment among Australians 35 and over was at **4.9%**.³⁸

The 84 young people who participated in this study shared a *lot* of information with us - nearly 30 hours' worth, in fact - which is substantial, even when distilled down into the pages of this report. But what should readers take away from those insights? What do they mean, and what can be done about them?

In this section, we further unpack the most critical findings from the focus groups in light of existing research on Australian youth engagement with arts and culture. As previously mentioned, 'young middle Australians' is a descriptive term, and consequently, this is not a group that the Australian Bureau of Statistics specifically reports on. In fact, the definitions of 'young people' and 'young adults' vary widely across different agencies and research bodies in Australia, encompassing age ranges from 12-24-year-olds³⁹ at the younger end of the spectrum, to 20-35-year-olds⁴⁰ at the upper end. So, in Part 2, we provide some context regarding the cultural engagement of 'young people' and 'young adults' in Australia, drawing on existing research that incorporates a range of different age brackets and definitions available in this country. We also outline key opportunities arising from this research. Again, we do that using the following themes:

1. What *is* 'arts and culture'?
2. What is *Australian* arts and culture?
3. What is the value of arts and culture *to society and to them personally*?
4. How do the cultural and creative industries *work*?

To draw the opportunities presented by these 4 themes together, ANA is calling for a National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan (NACC Plan).⁴¹ A NACC Plan would allow for strategic coordination of the needs and priorities of the many relevant stakeholders of arts and culture in this country, including those of young people, and would be a practical way for the Australian Government to facilitate more coherent and effective investments, as well as legislative, regulatory and policy settings.

Opportunity:

Prepare and implement a National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan to inform more coherent, non-partisan policy settings and investments and clarify responsibilities across the three levels of government. Digital disruption, changing demographics and a global cultural market are changing our opportunities and preferences; a NACC Plan will help Australia respond to and anticipate these changes.

Part 2 Q1: What is 'arts and culture'?

Implications of young Australians' definitions

2.1.1

'Arts and culture' is the sum of several different types of experience

Young middle Australians believe that **arts and cultural activities need to meet a number of criteria: they are a form of or catalyst for expression, they are experiential, they tell a story and/or they create opportunities for togetherness.** This aligns with the generalised definition of cultural engagement.

As mentioned in the Introduction, cultural engagement is broadly defined as any level of involvement with an arts, cultural or creative activity, including consuming, attending, performing and creating. Similar terms include cultural participation, arts participation and cultural involvement. For more on these various definitions and how they have been used in Australian research, see [Appendix 1](#).

It is useful to take this inclusive approach to defining cultural engagement because, as the young middle Australians in our focus groups pointed out, these activities are becoming increasingly hybrid notions. The blurry lines between producer and consumer brought about by Web 2.0⁴² have catalysed broader trends that can be seen across many arts and cultural (and indeed many other) activities. For example, if you attend a visual art exhibition and

create an Instagram story about your experience there, you are 1) attending an arts and cultural venue, 2) consuming the art on the walls and 3) creating something new that can be shared with a different audience.

While all four of the listed criteria are important, expression and storytelling are more traditionally incorporated into a definition of arts and culture anyway, while the other two - experiential immersion and togetherness - may be harder to incorporate into some arts and cultural forms. Nonetheless, understanding their importance is critical to engaging with this cohort, and so we shall unpack them further here.

Immersion and having an experience

Many creators now take advantage of these trends of active participation and immersion in their work, even in offline contexts. Take, for example, 'Dirty Dancing: The Immersive Cinema Experience'.⁴³ Held at open-air venues around Australia, attendees could wander the grounds at their own pace to enjoy scenes being played in various locations or break it up by participating in the kinds of 1960s vacation lodge

activities that were quintessential to the film, with badminton, golf, dance classes, painting workshops, food trucks and bars creating a festival-like atmosphere and getting the 'audience' intimately involved in the action. If one does a dance class at an event like this, does that qualify as attending, consuming, performing or creating? Actually, all of the above, and this is why a broad definition of cultural engagement is a useful way to encompass this increasing trend towards interactivity.

Opportunity:

To engage young middle Australians in arts and cultural activities, build in experiential aspects and opportunities for immersion, either in person or digitally.

Want more?

See Appendix 1 for an overview of different studies' definitions of cultural engagement. See what we mean by arts, culture and creativity for more on ANA's categorisation of cultural engagement.



Figure 8: Youtube video overview of the 2019 'Dirty Dancing: the Immersive Cinema Experience', showing the blurry lines between creators, performers and audiences.
Video source: Reproduced with permission from Mushroom Creative House.

Togetherness

Although the focus on togetherness is critical for most of this cohort, many young middle Australians do not require *physical* togetherness to have these needs met. For example, being a member of online groups focused around particular areas of interest – a particular genre of book, a gaming community or groups for fans of specific creators, artworks or organisations, for example – didn't just enhance the experience; it was the deciding factor as to whether they considered it to be arts and culture at all. This suggests that the addition of opportunities to be together, either on or offline, and specifically to interact and feel immersed in a joint experience, is key to engaging this cohort.

Cultural and creative organisations and individuals could consider activities like setting up an online group to discuss a novel or TV series, a Twitch stream to engage with people live while playing or creating, or bringing a director or the cast of a show on stage after a performance so the audience can ask questions. While these types of activities may have traditionally been seen as audience development or marketing – separate to the cultural experience itself – for this cohort it is part and parcel of the experience. Investors and supporters (including governments and philanthropists) with a priority focus on this cohort should ensure their funding programs recognise the role of these types of engagement activities as inherent to the cultural experience.

Opportunity:

Ensure funding programs by investors and supporters (including governments and philanthropy) recognise the role of interactive engagement activities as inherent to the cultural experience for young middle Australians.

Understanding these criteria should give cultural and creative institutions and individuals new insight into what is likely to engage this cohort – a cohort that, the research shows, genuinely wants to be engaged, now more than ever. With these insights, there is an opportunity to build layers into and around specific outputs, either building those layers inherently *into* the work, or *surrounding* the work in an authentic way (i.e. not just as an add-on for promotion purposes).

Opportunity:

Incorporate at least three of the following in arts and cultural experiences to ensure they are relevant and appealing to young middle Australians: (1) creative expression and self-discovery; (2) inspiration, an immersive experience or a different perspective; (3) telling a story; (4) an opportunity to be together with others (in person or digitally).

2.1.2

'High arts' are for people like these

Young people are okay with the word 'arts' – they don't feel excluded by this term or by the specific artforms normally associated with 'high arts' the way middle-aged Australians did in 'A view from middle Australia', our 2020 report. They are also typically okay with using this term to encompass a broad range of activities. The activities that were included in a definition of the arts differed from person to person, and participants were okay with that.

We noted in 'A view from middle Australia' that, although the middle Australians in those focus groups did mention specific artforms that they felt excluded from – opera, ballet, contemporary dance and classical music were examples that were frequently raised – they were also bringing up festivals, shows and other types of events that they *loved*, which featured aspects of these artforms. Participants mentioned Cirque du Soleil, which incorporates opera and contemporary dance but is performed in a circus tent; Symphony in the Park; and the annual open-air event in WA called Ballet at the Quarry among other examples. This suggests that it was not the artform that was making middle Australians feel uncomfortable and excluded. It was more likely the connotations they associated with the spaces those artforms were held in.

Young middle Australians made less of a connection between grand (read: potentially unwelcoming or inaccessible) spaces; wealthy, exclusionary people; and specific artforms. Young Australians would go to an

opera if someone gave them a ticket or check out the ballet if they thought the storyline would interest them. They may or may not have gone to an art gallery recently, but they weren't ruling it out for the near future either. And they were certainly looking at things like that online, particularly if that kind of content was showing up in their social media feeds.

There are many ways for traditionally 'high art' experiences to engage with this cohort, irrespective of what kind of arts and cultural activity is involved. As an example, in a case study of Opera Australia's engagement with Barkly Regional Arts in the Northern Territory, the Opera Australia associate producer for touring pointed out that true collaboration and exchange was critical to the success of their regional engagement program. They had realised early on that they simply wouldn't engage (or even have) audiences if they took a traditional approach; they needed to make it flexible to what the community wanted and get the community involved. This was equally critical from the perspective of the regional communities involved in the program.

The idea being that there is cross-way learning; they [Opera Australia] learn about the music that's here [in Tennant Creek]; we learn about their music out there, and it brings in the families who want to watch and support our artists being there.⁴⁴

(KATHY BURNS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, BARKLY REGIONAL ARTS, NT)

Opera Australia also runs the Regional Children's Chorus, which involves recruiting a chorus of local children in each town they tour to and teaching them the songs so they can perform on stage alongside the professionals. Opera Australia describes their goal for regional engagement as continuing to 'challenge preconceptions of what an opera can be and how it can be experienced'.⁴⁵

Opportunity:

Continually review investment and support for activities that increase access and reduce barriers to participation in the arts, including 'high arts', among young middle Australians.

2.1.3

Consuming, attending, creating

Young middle Australians do see a difference between consuming arts and cultural content (such as watching TV, watching content online, reading a book, or playing games on a phone, console or computer), attending cultural events and venues (such as going to the movies, to a gallery, to the theatre or to a festival), and being creative themselves, either by making something (which for most included digital creations including memes) or performing something (including singing karaoke with your mates or dancing in your living room). They see benefits to each, but while middle-aged middle Australians were happy for all these kinds of activities to come under a single heading of 'arts and culture', these category breakdowns really seemed to matter to the 18-29-year-olds.

Interestingly, this distinction between consumption, attendance and creation/active participation is captured in the way Australian Government bodies collect data about these areas.

Creation and active participation (including performance) is measured by the ABS Cultural Participation Survey,⁴⁶ in which 15-24-year-olds have the highest frequency of participation of any age group. Figure 9 shows the kinds of arts and cultural activities young Australians like to do, and what percentage of young Australians do them.

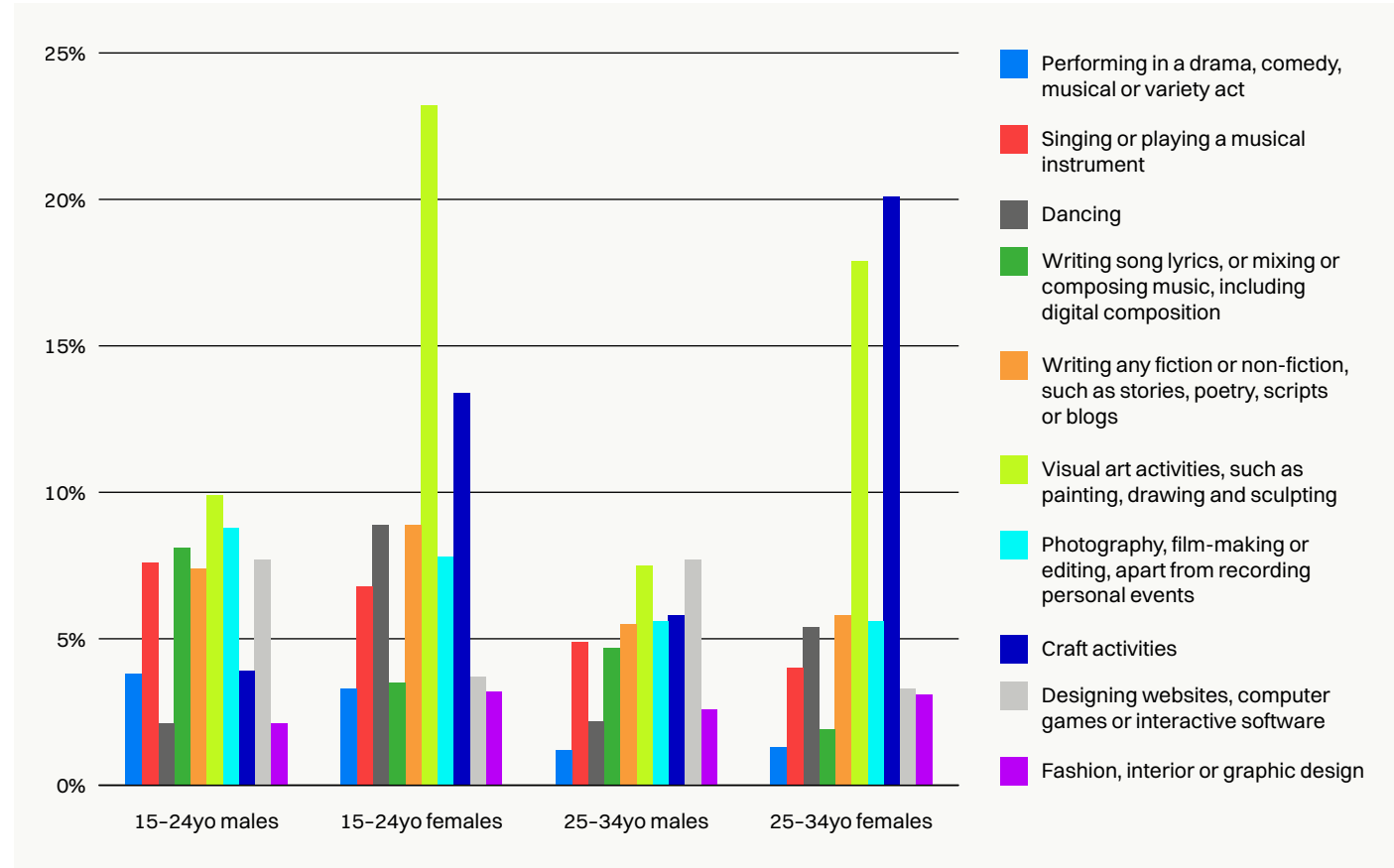


Figure 9: Arts and cultural activities young Australians (aged 15-34) participate in.
Source: ABS, 2019, Cultural Participation Survey 2017-18 dataset. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/participation-selected-cultural-activities/latest-release>.

Attendance is captured in a separate measure: the ABS Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events Survey.⁴⁷ Again, younger Australians are more likely to attend these kinds of venues and events than their older counterparts, with more than 88% of male 18-34-year-olds and more than 90% of females in the same age group having attended at least once in the 12 months before the survey was conducted. These numbers steadily declined with each increase in age bracket. Figure 10 shows the kinds of venues and events young Australians like to visit.

Consumption is measured by the Australia Council for the Arts' National Arts Participation Survey (NAPS), which measures listening to recorded music, reading and digital engagement such as with podcasts, music streaming services and digital radio; and by Screen Australia, which captures screen consumption through various measures. The NAPS data shows that 15-34-year-olds have the highest rate of listening to recorded music (95-96% compared to the population average of 92%); around 74% of 15-34-year-olds read for leisure, topped only by the over-65s; and 15-34-year-olds are by far the most likely to engage with arts and culture online, at 96% compared to the average of 82%.⁴⁸

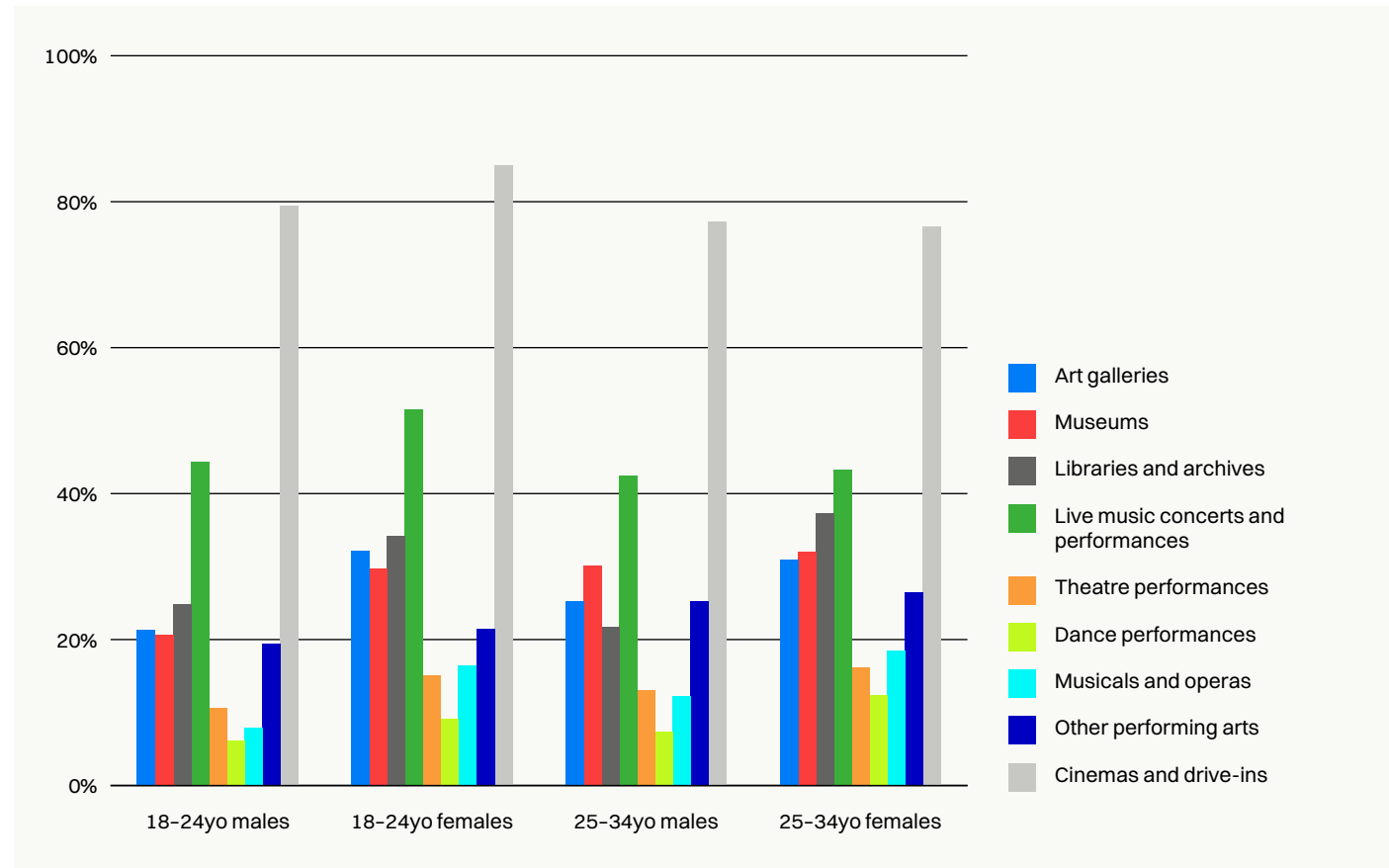


Figure 10: Arts and cultural events and venues attended by young Australians.
 Source: ABS, 2019, Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events 2017-18 dataset.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/attendance-selected-cultural-venues-and-events-australia/latest-release>.

In terms of consumption of screen content, young Australians are typically less likely to consume broadcast television but are more likely to engage with content on their own schedule – that is, 'on demand'. This may seem obvious in an era of Netflix and Stan but was in fact also the case back in 2012 before streaming became ubiquitous in Australia. At that time, they were found to be more likely to choose video viewing and gaming participation over broadcast TV compared to older generations.⁴⁹

In addition to measuring consumption, the Australia Council's NAPS survey also measures attendance and creation, finding similar results to the ABS surveys. Additionally, NAPS asks about barriers to participation, attendance and engagement. The most significant reasons that 15-34-year-olds gave for not participating in culture were 1) 'cost of tickets/entry' at 29% for 15-24-year-olds and 28% for 25-34-year-olds, and 2) 'too far away/not near where I live' at 22% for 15-24-year-olds and 21% for 25-34-year-olds.

Opportunity:

Consider access and barriers to consumption, attendance and creation/performance as separate concerns when planning for cultural and creative engagement activities with young middle Australians.

Young Australian adults are more likely to attend cultural events and venues, more likely to be involved in creating or performing and more likely to engage with screen-based content 'on demand' than any older Australian generation.

Part 2 Q2:

What is *Australian* arts and culture? Implications of young Australians' perceptions of nation building, diversity and inclusion

2.2.1

Diverse stories reflecting diverse communities

Being able to relate to the stories you see and hear around you is incredibly powerful. This is as true for smaller, less mainstream communities as it is for their larger and more dominant counterparts. And sometimes, that means that not all stories will appeal to everyone equally. At the 1999 Cannes Film Festival, the winning film, 'Rosetta', set in Belgium, so resonated with Belgian audiences that the Belgian government introduced a new initiative related to the film's themes and named it 'The Rosetta Plan'.⁵⁰ The same film was widely slammed by American reviewers and audiences for being out of touch with the lives of real people. Context matters.

This is equally the case with arts and culture in Australia, particularly for Australians living in outer suburbs and regional areas, and even more so with people of diverse cultural backgrounds, sexual orientations and physical or intellectual abilities. Our focus groups showed that young middle Australians want to see a greater variety of stories told in arts and cultural spaces, especially on screens. Non-Anglo-Celtic Australians were particularly keen to see their stories reflected in Australian content, but participants in every focus group, irrespective of gender, cultural background, sexuality or location, wanted to see content representing the true diversity of Australia and recognising that Indigenous arts and culture sit at the core of Australian arts and culture. Australia has one of the most diverse

populations on earth, and this has been widely recognised as one of our greatest assets along with the fact that we live and create art on land where people have been living and creating art for millennia – longer than anywhere else on earth. Young middle Australians want to see those assets recognised and celebrated.

Somewhat ironically, recent research from the Australia Council for the Arts pointed out that First Nations people and Australians with diverse cultural backgrounds are significantly more likely to attend live cultural events in person, engage with arts and culture online and identify as creators themselves.⁵¹ Yet they found that these groups have proportionately lower representation in cultural leadership roles and among grant recipients. Focus group research conducted for this Australia Council study also found that artists with culturally diverse backgrounds felt 'excluded from cultural venues and organisations, educational institutions, government and funding bodies', pointing out that, 'this can hinder career development, prevent stories from being told and create barriers between artists and audiences'.⁵² Similarly, a report by

Screen Australia found that in 2015, only 18% of main characters in Australian TV dramas had non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, significantly lower than the 32% of non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds found in the broader population.⁵³ And while 5% of main characters on screens were Indigenous Australians, slightly higher than in the broader population, these characters were concentrated in a smaller number of shows. 36% of Australian programs in 2015 still had casts that were entirely of Anglo-Celtic backgrounds.

Opportunity:

Prioritise schemes, incentives and requirements that support production and distribution of diverse Australian content and iconography that is relatable to young middle Australians in all communities across Australia.

2.2.2 National reputation

Young middle Australians are concerned about how other countries perceive Australia. They want people to be able to pick up on our culture as soon as they 'set foot' in the country and understand more than the Crocodile Dundee stereotypes by watching Australian films and television. They want us to be perceived as larrikins and laid back, but not as jokes to be laughed *at* – more as *jokers* to be laughed *with*. And they want other nations to know that there is more to Australia than only our larrikin side, particularly in terms of Indigenous arts and culture, which many see as our most unique and valuable asset for representing Australia internationally.

These concerns and suggestions align with the Australian Government's Foreign Policy White Paper from 2017.⁵⁴ This paper suggested that culture and cultural activity are at the heart of efforts of countries that have effectively mobilised public diplomacy initiatives. It argued that to better harness Australia's creative potential in the area of public diplomacy, we need bipartisan and public

confidence in, and support of, our nation's cultural life. And as we have argued elsewhere, our international reputation as a prosperous, well-educated and inclusive country has long buoyed us in our international relations. However, in recent years, that reputation is starting to slip. According to a range of international measures, our nation brand – the sum of people's perceptions of our country – has reduced in value over the last five to eight years.⁵⁵

Opportunity:

Draw on Australia's cultural inheritance to create public diplomacy initiatives that celebrate Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture as well as the diverse stories of our multicultural nation.

Part 2 Q3:

What is the *value* of arts and culture to society and individuals? Implications of young Australians' perceptions of value

2.3.1

Arts and cultural engagement as a 'third place', and its role in mitigating loneliness and isolation

Although the 18-29-year-old cohort share many of their needs around arts and culture with middle-aged middle Australians, a key difference between the two groups is in the regularity of engagement. While middle Australians feel that arts and culture are special-occasion kind of experiences - not for every day - young middle Australians see arts and cultural engagement as woven through everyday life. Not only do they see daily engagement with arts and culture as acceptable and beneficial, but they also see it as inevitable and unavoidable.

This is, in part, because young middle Australians are comfortable with a broad definition of 'arts', as well as 'arts and culture' - the terms are equally inclusive for this cohort. Take everyday activities like listening to music on your headphones while you're at the shops, admiring the design work on the labels you're perusing, stopping to watch some street performers on your way to the bus, then watching TikTok clips or

creating Instagram Stories on the bus as you head home - when these kinds of activities can all count as engaging with arts and culture, then it becomes obvious why young middle Australians feel that arts and culture are not only for special occasions; they're for all occasions.

One could argue that arts and culture have become intertwined, for young people, with spaces that have been described as 'third places'.⁵⁶ Third places are locations (that is, either physical spaces like cafes, parks, festivals and weekend markets, as well as online spaces like social media forums or online gaming community spaces - but we'll come back to online spaces in the next section⁵⁷) where we interact informally with people and society. The 'first place' is the home - an important but typically private space. The 'second place' is work, which is highly structured and often 'reduces individuals to a single, productive role'.⁵⁸ A third place is neutral ground on which people who are not so intimate as family, but do want to be in

each other's company, can meet and enjoy interacting with each other to the extent that they feel comfortable doing so. Third places are accessible to the public. They inherently involve some level of engagement with others, and you can go there alone or in a group and feel equally comfortable and safe. You're likely to see people there that you've seen there before, and they are often taken for granted. Playfulness is encouraged.

These descriptors align very well with the way young middle Australians describe their daily engagements with arts and culture, particularly with face-to-face interactions in physical space. Participants described 'hanging out' with friends at live cultural events and 'hanging around' with a wide range of people in cultural and community centres. They described arts and cultural icons and landmarks as 'places to meet friends' that were easy to find and gave you something to talk about and using arts and cultural activities as 'something to do' with others that was different to just sitting around talking. In other words, they were casual about their encounters with arts and culture; they took them for granted. Scholars from the Youth Research Centre have found that place, and everyday interactions that a young person has with place, contribute to their sense of belonging, especially in rural and regional Australian locations. Connections to locations and landscapes come together with

individuals' perception of their community and their role in that community to build a sense of 'thick' or 'thin' belonging, depending on how intertwined individuals become with these spaces.⁵⁹ A sense of belonging, in turn, helps to mitigate feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

Our 2019 review of the evidence-based impacts of arts, culture and creativity found that a quarter of all Australians report frequent feelings of loneliness, and the risks of premature death due to loneliness and social isolation have been found to be as big or bigger than obesity, smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day or air pollution.⁶⁰ This review also highlighted studies that have found that deliberately focusing cultural and creative interventions towards social cohesion helps to build community, belonging and trust; it enhances empathy and inclusion and helps combat the growing issues of loneliness and isolation.

Arts and cultural experiences, as this young middle Australian cohort perceive them, can provide opportunities to build the crucial prerequisites of close friendships: 'proximity; repeated, unplanned interactions; and a setting that encourages people to let their guard down and confide in each other'.⁶¹

Opportunity:

To mitigate loneliness, social exclusion and social isolation among young middle Australians, prioritise using arts and cultural activities in existing and new initiatives, especially in placemaking and community-building.

In addition to the obvious benefits of social cohesion for society, the findings of this report are also good news for Australia given the extensive research showing the relationship between engagement with arts and culture, increasing public safety and decreasing recidivism.⁶²

2.3.2

Arts and culture enliven any kind of locality, not just inner-city areas

Participants in this study lived in outer suburbs of major cities and in regional towns. These are often the areas where the so-called 'quiet Australians'⁶³ live and are raising their children. Yet they are also areas that scholars have described in the past as being 'culturally barren':

Australian suburban life has long been imagined and experienced as distinct from inner-city life. The association of inner-urban life with excitement, diversity, and inclusivity contrasts sharply with suburban life with its associations of peace, order, and privacy (on the one hand), and homogeneity and desolation (on the other).⁶⁴

That said, there have always been dissenters to this view,⁶⁵ and many of the 18–29-year-olds from our focus groups would likely be among them. Although some who were regionally located described frustrations that the major cities had a livelier cultural experience than they did, most described the importance of community arts and culture in their lives and the lives of their friends and families. Indeed, research indicates that Australian outer suburbs are increasingly becoming hubs of creative engagement, and this was reflected in the experiences of many participants.⁶⁶

Participants were keen to see funding for arts and culture reach communities like theirs. They believed that local level arts and cultural activity helped to build community, bring people together and provide a safe space for working through positive and negative emotions. They also believed that arts and culture make spaces unique, which in the context of local communities, also makes them worth visitation by tourists. These findings support much of the existing literature around placemaking in outer suburban and regional areas, especially in places that hope to attract or retain young people.⁶⁷ Making spaces vibrant by enhancing their 'social offerings, openness and aesthetics',⁶⁸ such as creating iconic visual imagery (from the 'Big Green Cactus' in Perth to the 'Penis Owl' in Canberra),⁶⁹ having music, lighting and shapes that have been designed to create a feeling of openness and safety, and providing and maintaining infrastructure that enables these goals are steps that young people would likely encourage policy makers to take.

Opportunity:

Consider how funding programs, public policy and political leadership can reflect the value young middle Australians place on making arts and cultural experiences and infrastructure accessible to people wherever they live and on increasing accessibility in the way public spaces are designed.

2.3.3

Digital arts and culture are here to stay

Accessibility and innovation: opportunities for arts and culture catalysed by Covid-19

In his opening address to a recent webinar, Federal Arts Minister the Hon. Paul Fletcher described how, despite the many difficulties Covid-19 has wrought for cultural and creative organisations and individuals, many have successfully 'pivoted' to create new opportunities, and most of these opportunities were made possible by turning to digital.⁷⁰ There are benefits to this for both audiences and cultural organisations. The pivot to digital in arts and culture has increased access to arts and cultural experiences, especially for people in regional and remote areas and for people with disabilities, and it allows Australians to continue enjoying arts and cultural experiences even when they can't (or don't wish to) leave their homes. At the same time, the innovations introduced by many organisations have now let them access new audiences and build stronger relationships with existing audiences. The digital pivot has also made arts and cultural consumers more comfortable with digital means of accessing – and purchasing – arts and cultural content, increasing revenue potential for cultural organisations in the future. All these ideas are well aligned with the findings of our focus group study.

In the same webinar, Executive Director Libby Christie of The Australian Ballet pointed out that while it has been highly worthwhile for that organisation, pivoting to digital is neither easy nor cheap.⁷¹ She outlined four core reasons to begin embedding digital into ways of working for an arts and cultural organisation:

1. To be competitive with other forms of entertainment
2. To be efficient in how content is distributed
3. To build brand and reputation
4. To continue engaging with audiences and even extend audience reach during the Covid-19 era when audiences may not be comfortable engaging in person

But Christie also pointed out that it would take time and support for this digital pivot to become profitable. She noted that it has been possible for The Australian Ballet to implement these changes, at least in part, because of RISE funding – an Australian federal government initiative to assist arts and entertainment sector organisations with projects, activities and events that will help the sector recover from Covid-19 disruptions.⁷² Support like this will be critical for cultural and creative organisations if they are to continue to offer both digital and non-digital offerings in the post-Covid world.

Opportunity:

Ensure the role digital spaces play in community-building and connection is understood and respected in policy, legislative and regulatory settings and that cultural programming approaches in-person and digital connections as complementary, rather than in competition.

Opportunity:

Consider long-term opportunities to support arts and cultural organisations in pivoting to digital, given the importance that Australians, and especially young middle Australians, are now placing on digital engagement with arts and culture.



Figure 11: Popular mobile phone games like 'Pokémon Go' and 'Ingress' use augmented reality technology to allow users to engage simultaneously with physical and virtual worlds. Both games incorporate public art as landmarks, prompting players to get out of the house and connect with their local environment. Image source: Photo 95247011 © David Molina

'When the demons of loneliness or boredom strike': Digital arts and culture as 'third places'

Given the prevalence of discussion about young Australians' engagement with digital arts and culture, it's worth considering how online cultural 'places' could be enhanced. Participants described socialising and connecting in a 'low key' way in online spaces like TikTok, Instagram and Twitch. They felt that being able to engage in these communities and activities at their own pace, when they needed them, was positive for their mental health and overall happiness and wellbeing. This, too, aligns with the idea of arts and cultural experiences as intertwined with third places:

Third places that render the best and fullest service are those to which one may go alone at almost any time of the day or evening with assurance that acquaintances will be there. To have such a place available whenever the demons of loneliness or boredom strike, or when the pressures and frustrations of the day call for relaxation amid good company, is a powerful resource.⁷³

Digital forms of engagement (often on social platforms) make this feeling of everyday-ness possible. Digital engagement with arts and culture is so embedded in young people's lives that if you're not on digital platforms, it would be difficult to deeply connect with this cohort. Given that young people are more likely to want to engage with arts and culture than their older counterparts, digital platforms create an opportunity to 'meet them where they are' and form deep relationships with potential audiences/fans in this age group.

Opportunity:

Acknowledge the critical role that online communities play in the lives of young people. Build safe, vibrant, accessible online spaces in which young people can meet and connect over arts and cultural experiences and activities, understanding that these spaces can be vital to building a sense of belonging for this cohort.

2.3.4

Arts and culture, and knowledge about the *benefits* of arts and culture, should be made consistently available in schools

Young middle Australians believe in the power of arts and culture to help children both in and out of school, but they worry that the curriculum is so flexible that different schools are providing vastly different experiences for students in this area. They're not wrong to be concerned. Education and extracurricular opportunities play critical roles in reducing negative effects that can come from growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.⁷⁴ And as existing research indicates, for young people from lower- to middle-income families or living in outer suburban and regional areas, arts and cultural education is critical in increasing cultural capital and social capital, both of which make a huge difference for lifelong outcomes.

Many participants, particularly those who identified as Anglo-Australians, noted that their parents 'weren't very cultured', or that arts and culture had not been given much emphasis in their households when they were growing up. This isn't to say they didn't engage with these kinds of activities – most could think of examples from their childhoods of listening or singing along to music, drawing or painting, watching television shows, going to the movies or going on family holidays during which they had engaged with various arts and cultural experiences. But it hadn't occurred to their families, and therefore to them, to ever think about those activities as arts and culture or consider the benefits they were potentially gaining from engaging with them. Having the

opportunity to talk these ideas through in the context of a focus group catalysed that thinking for the first time for many of them, with several pointing out that they would be rethinking the way they talked about those activities with their existing or hypothetical future children.

Arts and cultural education in schools, however, does provide opportunities for young people who are not engaging with these activities actively or knowingly to be made more conscious of the benefits they can gain from this kind of engagement. Although the Australian F-10 Curriculum provides a rationale for the inclusion of arts and culture, there are no learning areas associated with that rationale – that is, students are taught to create, to perform and to critically analyse existing works, but there is nothing in the curriculum to ensure they understand why it will be beneficial for them to learn these things. This contrasts with areas like Health and Physical Education, or Technologies, in which understanding of these rationales is built into the curriculum and the assessment.⁷⁵ Although there are no doubt many individual teachers and schools who do build these explanations into their teaching of arts and culture, without consistency across the curriculum, children are left unprotected.

Similarly, although many states and territories subsidise children's engagement with sport and physical activity, very few subsidise engagement with cultural and creative activity.

This is a shame, as the sport and physical activity programs have been found to be very effective in getting children engaged with this kind of activity, suggesting that subsidy programs also have real potential in arts and culture.⁷⁶ The Creative Kids voucher program in NSW is a good example of an exception; this program allows parents to apply for \$100 vouchers for their children to participate in 'creative arts, speech, drama, dance, digital design, coding and music lessons and activities'.⁷⁷

Opportunity:

To support good lifelong outcomes for young people, especially those from lower- to middle-income families or living in outer suburban and regional areas, both arts and culture and the benefits of participating in them should be taught consistently at school.

Opportunity:

Subsidy programs for arts and cultural activities and/or tuition would benefit children from every state and territory and ensure that cost is not a barrier to access for any Australian child.

2.3.5

Sporting events and arts and cultural events are not in competition

Both our own and existing research indicates that young people who are interested in attending live arts and cultural venues and events are also likely to attend sports events or other kinds of events - science exhibitions, food and beverage festivals, makers and farmers markets and so on. People who like to go to things just...like to go to things. There has long been a narrative in Australia that arts and culture are in opposition to sport, with a recent report pointing out that:

Australia's public culture is overwhelmingly about sport, perhaps because a few events draw very big crowds. But the private lives of Australians are much more about arts and culture. More Australians buy tickets more often for performing arts performances than live sport, they watch twice as much drama as sport on television, and they are more likely to create arts and culture for themselves than to play sport.⁷⁸

Our research supports this notion and suggests it can be taken even further; that these two policy areas actually enhance each other, working together to create a vibrant cultural life for the nation. The real reason this matters, then, is also articulated in the abovementioned report - it is of great importance that policy makers 'be persuaded to rework Australia's public symbols so they better reflect the actual lives of their people'.⁷⁹

Opportunity:

Consider how Australian life is represented in iconography, speeches, public documents and other items of public interest and ensure that arts and cultural activities are included in those items.

Part 2 Q4:

How do the cultural and creative industries work?

Implications of young Australians' knowledge of *cultural and creative industries' operating models*

2.4.1

If you build it, they will come: Young middle Australians' interest in arts and cultural income models and government funding

One interesting finding from this research was that young middle Australians had typically never thought about arts and cultural operating models or what role governments play in supporting arts and culture. However, once they really started reflecting on their feelings about the topic, they often found themselves highly engaged with passionate opinions, sometimes to their own surprise.

This suggests that young middle Australians are open to learning more about these areas. They want to know what their governments - at all levels - are funding in arts and culture and why. They want to understand how arts and cultural businesses operate. There is space here for cultural and creative industries, businesses and individuals to tell the stories of what they do well, where and why they need support, and who makes up the broad cultural and creative ecosystem of stakeholders in this space. Equally, there is an opportunity for governments at all levels to talk more to young people about the decisions they make around funding arts and culture, why they feel it is beneficial, who that funding is helping and how.

Opportunity:

Seek opportunities to talk to young people about arts and cultural funding and operating models as well as the roles of government and other stakeholders, and then ask them questions about their beliefs in this space.

2.4.2

Opportunities for 'reopening' Australia

Both existing research and our own have shown that the Covid-19 lockdowns had a huge impact on the cultural engagement of young Australians. They made young people more aware of what life without live arts and culture can look like and how important it is to them. Many participants described the enthusiasm with which they were looking forward to the arts and cultural landscape 'returning to normal'. These findings were entirely aligned with the research from the Australian Audience Monitor Outlook, showing that Australians under the age of 35 had the firmest intentions of any age group to engage more with live arts and cultural events once Australia fully reopened.⁸⁰

Opportunity:

Young middle Australians can be a key target audience in rebuilding consumer confidence for attending events and in-person cultural experiences as Australia emerges from Covid-19-related lockdowns and restrictions.

The changes to the digital landscape wrought by Covid-19 also present many opportunities for creators to engage with these new types of consumers. A recent report from Lippincott identified that there will be 6 major shifts in the lives of consumers over the next 10 years, and these could be noted by Australian cultural and creative organisations wanting to engage with young Australians:

1. Their lives will become more flexible and delocated, with a stronger emphasis on freedom, autonomy and accessibility.
2. They will increasingly blur the lines between what's private and what's public, valuing transparency in their own actions and in the actions of organisations.
3. They will see customisation and control over experiences as the norm.
4. They will expect to be able to consume 'on-demand' — instantly and at a time convenient to them.

5. They'll have more access to knowledge than any previous generation. Decision-making need never be a solo task with constant access to a collaborative and connected feedback loop.
6. They will live in a 'synthetic reality', where the distinction between digital versus real no longer makes sense, and everything is always both.⁸¹

Opportunity:

Consider emerging consumer trends when imagining new ways to produce creative content that is aimed at a young middle Australian audience.

Concluding thoughts

Well, I have 'life' [as a word associated with arts and culture] because basically, my life revolves around art and culture...I'm Aboriginal, so everything I basically do revolves around art and culture.

(SELF-IDENTIFIES AS FEMALE, 22, NT, ANGLO/ATSI, PROJECT OFFICER)

This country has a long and deep history of integrating arts and culture into every aspect of life. For the young middle Australians in this study, too, embedding arts and culture into their everyday experience is the only way they can imagine existing.

A future-focused approach to this policy area that meets the needs of these young people is aligned with ways of being that have been practised in this place for millennia.

The time to reflect that approach in public policy is now.

Summary of key opportunities

Public policy initiatives that would serve the interests of or be supported by young middle Australians:

Opportunity 1

Prepare and implement a National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan to inform more coherent, non-partisan policy settings and investments, and clarify responsibilities across the three levels of government. Digital disruption, changing demographics and a global cultural market are changing our opportunities and preferences; a Plan will help Australia respond to and anticipate these changes.

Opportunity 2

Update policy, regulatory and legislative settings to reflect the value young middle Australians place on: (1) making arts and cultural experiences and infrastructure accessible to people wherever they live, (2) increasing accessibility in the way public spaces are designed, and (3) making interactive engagement activities a priority.

Opportunity 3

To mitigate loneliness, social exclusion and social isolation among young middle Australians, prioritise using arts and cultural activities in existing and new initiatives, especially in placemaking and community-building, recognising that they can be creators, consumers, co-collaborators and enthusiastic attendees.

Opportunity 4

To support good lifelong outcomes for young people, arts and culture, and the benefits of engaging, should be taught consistently at school. This is especially relevant for those from lower- to middle-income families and those living in outer suburban and regional areas. This could be supplemented by subsidy programs for arts and cultural activities and/or tuition to ensure cost is not a barrier to access for any Australian child.

Opportunity 5

Prioritise schemes, incentives and requirements that support production and distribution of diverse Australian content and iconography that is relatable to young middle Australians in all communities across Australia. This includes drawing on Australia's cultural inheritance to create international public diplomacy initiatives that celebrate Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture as well as the diverse stories of our multicultural nation.

Opportunity 6

Take an industry transformation approach to supporting arts and cultural organisations in pivoting to digital, given the importance that Australians, especially young middle Australians, are now placing on digital engagement with arts and culture.

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Appendix 1:

About cultural engagement

To best understand the findings of this report, it is useful to understand a little about young people's cultural engagement – that is, any level of involvement they have with arts, cultural or creative activities, including consuming arts and culture, attending arts and cultural events, as well as being creative by performing and/or making things themselves.

'Exercise for your soul': Why cultural engagement is important for young people

There is a significant body of research showing that when young people engage with arts and culture, there is a wide range of benefits for those individuals in both the short and long term, as well as benefits for society more broadly. Young people can gain new skills and experiences, acquire a sense of achievement and belonging, get exposure to types of people who are different than they may have met before, cultivate their imagination and capacity for innovation and ingenuity, build both social and cultural capital and feel valued and sometimes really seen for the first time.⁸² A participant in an Australian study conducted in the Northern Territory described participation in youth arts as like 'exercise for your soul'.⁸³

Young people who engage with arts and culture are also, in the longer term, more likely to engage in civic participation activities⁸⁴ including prosocial behaviours (picking up litter, recycling or other activities that help maintain public goods) and civic behaviours such as volunteering, which contributes tens of billions of dollars to the Australian economy.⁸⁵ And research indicates that these effects occur irrespective of sociodemographic factors. In other words, even if you didn't get the best start in life, you're still likely to become a more engaged citizen in the long run if you've engaged with arts and culture in your youth.⁸⁶

Barriers and enablers:

Why some young people engage with arts and culture, and others don't

Research from across the globe has identified a range of factors that seem to influence whether a person is more or less likely to engage with arts and cultural activities in their childhood, teens or early adulthood. This section outlines five predictors of cultural engagement in the twenty-first century that helped us shape our focus group research with young Australians. These five factors are:

- sociodemographic determinants
- physical health and disability
- engagement with arts and culture at school
- participation in other kinds of extracurricular activities
- Covid-19 lockdowns as both barriers and enablers.

Sociodemographic determinants

The most common and well-researched determinants of engagement with arts and culture are related to demographic factors like how and where one grows up. This research typically indicates that female youths engage more than young males (implying that being female can be an enabler and being male can be a barrier to cultural engagement) and that membership in the ethnic majority in your country is an enabler.⁸⁷

Socioeconomic factors have been shown to be significant: children from lower-income households whose parents have lower levels of education and/or low-status occupations are significantly less likely to engage with arts and cultural activities outside of school time (and this continues to be true once they have completed formal schooling).⁸⁸ Aligned with these findings, one of the most consistent enablers of childhood engagement with arts and cultural activities is having parents who have engaged with those activities as children themselves and who have engaged with those activities in the previous 12 months.⁸⁹

Interestingly, in countries where internet coverage is relatively consistent in rural areas (such as the UK), digital engagement with arts and culture is more prevalent in rural and remote locations than in cities,⁹⁰ while in Australia, living outside of a metropolitan area is a barrier for both digital and in-person engagement with arts and cultural activities.⁹¹ This indicates that although remote location may be a barrier to in-person cultural engagement, it need not be one for engaging online, so long as adequate infrastructure is in place.⁹²

Physical health and disability

There is strong evidence showing that engagement with arts and culture has positive effects on health in both the short and long term.⁹³ However, there is also some evidence indicating that physical ill health or disability can be correlated with lower levels of engagement with arts and culture in young people. For example, children with physical disabilities have been found to be more restricted in their engagement with cultural activities, particularly if these activities are not encouraged by their families. They are also more likely to participate less intensely, and often in the home rather than in group contexts.⁹⁴ This may relate to research that indicates that 'children with disabilities often feel socially isolated'.⁹⁵

Engagement with arts and culture at school

Another enabler of young people's cultural engagement is involvement in arts and culture at school. A study of in- and out-of-school participation in 'performing arts activities', 'arts, crafts and design activities' and 'archives, museums and heritage sites' among British youths showed that regardless of where a child lived, what their household's income was, their ethnic background or – most importantly – whether they had opportunities to participate in arts and cultural activities with their families, they still had an equal likelihood of participating in arts, cultural and creative activities at school.⁹⁶ This was the case both in schools with compulsory arts and culture in the curriculum and those where participation was voluntary – so long as these activities were offered in some form. This indicates that arts and cultural activities provided by schools are important to ensuring wider and more consistent access to arts and cultural activities among young people. The study found that this was important given findings that cultural engagement can help to reduce the effects of growing up in a low socioeconomic environment.

Participation in other kinds of extracurricular activities

A study of nearly 900 Australian adolescents across three states explored what factors could be associated with attendance at out-of-school live theatre, music and dance events.⁹⁷ Interestingly, the study found that adolescents who attended sporting events were more likely to also attend cultural events. This lends support to emerging theories about extracurricular activities with young people indicating that rather than the dichotomy that is often presented between interest in the arts versus interest in sport, the types of young people who participate in either arts or sport are also more likely to participate in a wide range of other kinds of activities. These forms of participation are complementary, not competing.

Covid-19 lockdowns as both barriers and enablers

Pandemic lockdowns over the last 18 months have unquestionably created barriers for people all over the world to access arts and culture live and in person. However, various studies undertaken during this period have explored whether the lockdowns also created opportunities or conditions that have encouraged new forms of cultural engagement, sometimes even above and beyond previous levels of engagement.

For example, the Australia Council for the Arts commissioned the Audience Outlook Monitor to track audience sentiment throughout the pandemic. In phases two and three of this research (i.e. data captured in July and September 2020), participants under 35 were the most likely to report that the health crisis had encouraged them to attend more as well as to spend more on arts and cultural activities in the future.⁹⁸

Looking overseas, a recent national study of New Zealanders found that 18-29-year-olds were more likely than the national average to have participated in arts and culture in 2020, despite the lockdowns and many felt that arts and culture had indeed supported their wellbeing during the lockdowns.⁹⁹ A British study found that young people (aged 18-29) increased their arts engagement during Covid-19 lockdowns across a wide range of activities such as singing, creative writing, painting, making films, creating digital artworks or animations, dancing and crafting.¹⁰⁰ Participants reported using arts and cultural activities to regulate their emotions and to avoid negative emotions. Somewhat ironically, participants who lived alone, felt lonely, or had a mental health diagnosis were less likely to use creative activities for emotional regulation in this study. This may correlate with a lack of awareness of the proven benefits for mental health that can be brought about through cultural engagement.

Understanding cultural participation, attendance, consumption and creation

When defined broadly, cultural participation is sometimes also called cultural engagement (as we have in this report) or cultural involvement. The **United Nations** takes this broad approach, putting a particular focus on the importance of national or ethnic cultures in describing how we make choices about participation in arts and culture. They define cultural participation as:

...participation in the arts and everyday life activities that may be associated with a particular culture. It refers to 'the ways in which ethnically-marked differences in cultural tastes, values and behaviours inform not just artistic and media preferences but are embedded in the daily rhythms of different ways of life, and of the ways in which these connect with other relevant social characteristics – those of class and gender, for example'.¹⁰¹

See the original source here:

<http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/cultural-participation>.

The Australia Council for the Arts conducts the annual **National Arts Participation Survey (NAPS)**, which captures 'how people from diverse backgrounds understand, participate in and value the arts'.¹⁰² This survey separates 'arts participation' into three subcategories, capturing data for each:

- Attendance: defined as experiencing arts activities in person or online.
- Creative participation: defined as creating, producing or collaborating in the making of art.
- Individualised consumption activities such as listening to recorded music, reading and digital engagement, which includes researching or reviewing the arts or artists online; creating, learning to create or selling art online; listening to streamed music; following or interacting with artists online; sharing arts with others or engaging with an online arts community; and using digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or Pinterest to engage with the arts.

Read more here: <https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/creating-our-future>.

The ABS captures data about Australians' experiences with arts and culture across a number of different instruments, though none of them provide a formal definition of cultural participation. The key one is the **Cultural Participation Survey**, which includes participation in cultural activities including:

- drama, comedy, musical or variety act (including acting on stage and film, street theatre, stand-up comedy, opera, cabaret, circus performances and rehearsals and classes)
- singing or playing a musical instrument as a soloist or as part of a band, choir or orchestra (including singing or playing in a public forum with an audience such as a with a church choir or performing at an aged care facility or retirement home. Also included are practicing and having lessons. Excluding informal or impromptu singing around the home and karaoke)
- dancing, including rehearsals and classes (including dancing for which the respondent has practised or taken lessons. Excluding dancing for another performance such as singing in a band and informal or impromptu dancing such as at weddings or nightclubs)
- writing song lyrics or mixing or composing music, including digital composition

- writing any fiction or non-fiction such as stories, poetry, scripts or blogs
- visual art activities such as painting, drawing or sculpting (including face and body painting, cartooning, digital art pieces, tattooing, printmaking, screen printing and etching)
- craft activities (including knitting, embroidery, cross stitch, tapestries, quilting, applique, dressmaking or tailoring, jewellery making, beading, scrapbooking, card making, collage, wood crafts, pottery, ceramics and mosaics. Respondents were asked to exclude mending, repairing and maintenance for clothing and wood craft)
- photography, film-making or editing, apart from personal events (excluding acting in a film, scriptwriting and use of video or DVD as a tool in another activity)
- designing websites, computer games or interactive software
- fashion, interior or graphic design (excluding home DIY projects).

The Cultural Participation Survey defines a cultural activity as 'an activity in which a person has participated, which has not been done for secondary or tertiary studies. Respondents were asked whether they participated in each of the selected cultural activities listed, in the 12 months before interview'.¹⁰³

Read more here: <https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/participation-selected-cultural-activities-australia-methodology/2017-18>.

Notably, the adult questionnaire does not include consumption activities such as attending live performances, watching films, looking at visual art or reading a book.¹⁰⁴ Some of these are captured in the ABS's **Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events Survey**,¹⁰⁵ but this survey still does not capture engagement with arts and culture in the home or as an individual, when the purpose is for leisure, such as reading, watching TV, listening to the radio or even singing in the shower or dancing in the living room. This survey was last conducted in 2017–18 and data is typically collected every four years. The ABS assesses cultural attendance by asking whether participants have 'attended at least one selected cultural venue or event in the last 12 months'. They were then asked which of the selected cultural venues and events they had visited, and how often they had visited each. The selected cultural venues and events included:

- libraries or archives
- art galleries
- museums
- cinemas
- live music concerts or performances
- musicals or operas
- theatre performances
- dance performances
- other performing arts.

Read more here: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/attendance-selected-cultural-venues-and-events-australia/latest-release>.

Although the ABS does not capture screen participation (and screen is not part of the Australia Council's remit), Screen Australia has in the past collected data about **media participation**, which is inclusive of:

- watching television (both free-to-air and subscription)
- going to the cinema
- watching a video/DVD/Blu-ray
- watching videos online, either on a computer or mobile phone
- social media participation
- console gaming, both on and offline.¹⁰⁶

Read more here: <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/fact-finders/people-and-businesses/audience-trends/media-participation-rates>.

In 2007 the ABS created **Arts and Culture in Australia: A Statistical Overview**, which collated statistics from a wide range of different sources dating back as far as the 1990s.¹⁰⁷ As part of this, they presented data for 'Time spent on cultural activities', defining this as time spent by participants on any cultural activity, regardless of whether it was the main activity being undertaken at the time or whether it was a secondary activity being undertaken simultaneously (such as watching TV while eating a meal). The cultural activities in this study included:

- visiting entertainment and cultural venues (movies, concerts, theatres, libraries, museums, exhibitions, art galleries, zoos, botanical gardens, amusement parks, other mass events)
- attendance at sports events
- religious activities and ritual ceremonies
- sport and outdoor activity
- games, hobbies, arts and crafts
- reading
- watching TV
- watching videos
- listening to radio
- listening to CDs, records and tapes
- attendance at recreational courses.

To see the full study:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/arts-and-culture-australia-statistical-overview>

For more on how ANA defines participation in arts, culture and creativity, [see What we mean by arts and culture](#).

Appendix 2:

Technical appendix – Research design and methodology

In May 2021, A New Approach (ANA) commissioned the Social Research Centre to undertake focus group research with ‘young middle Australians’ aged 18–29 years of age from across Australia, to explore their perceptions and attitudes relating to arts and culture. Between May and June 2021, the Social Research Centre conducted 21 online focus groups across every Australian state and territory. The research and analysis was led by Dr Stephen Cuttriss in collaboration with ANA.

Focus group composition

The 84 participants in this study hailed from every state and territory in Australia. We have called them ‘young middle Australians’. This, like the term ‘middle Australians’ used in our 2020 report, is a descriptive term. We used the following criteria for recruiting participants:

- Must be 18–29 years old.
- Must self-identify as ‘undecided voters’ – that is, they have not yet decided who they will vote for in the next federal election or have changed their mind on who they will vote for at least once in the last 12 months.
- Their family’s household income when they were growing up was either lower (up to \$70,000 per household) or middle (\$70–\$150,000 per household).
- Must now live in outer suburban or regional locations (irrespective of where they grew up).
- Neither they, nor their parents or other immediate family members, will have worked in arts and culture as their primary occupation.

- Their parents worked in ‘lower- or middle-prestige occupations’ (this was assessed using an occupational prestige framework upon asking about parental occupation).
- 77% were registered to vote in electorates that were marginal before and/or after the 2019 federal election.

Participants lived in a range of electorates in each state or territory, as Table 1 demonstrates. 48% of participants were registered to vote in federal electorates currently held by the Coalition, and 52% lived in federal electorates currently held by Labor.

Table 1: Electorate breakdown by state

State / territory	Electorates	Currently held by	Marginal either before or after the 2019 federal election
ACT	Bean	ALP	No
	Fenner	ALP	No
NSW	Gilmore	ALP	Yes
	Cunningham	ALP	No
	Dobell	ALP	Yes
	Macquarie	ALP	Yes
	Bennelong	LIB	No
	Watson	ALP	No
	Paterson	ALP	Yes
	Fowler	ALP	No
	Lindsay	LIB	Yes
NT	Lingiari	ALP	Yes
	Solomon	ALP	Yes
Qld	Capricornia	LNP	Yes
	Petrie	LNP	Yes
	Forde	LNP	Yes
	Herbert	LNP	Yes
SA	Boothby	LIB	Yes
	Sturt	LIB	Yes

State / territory	Electorates	Currently held by	Marginal either before or after the 2019 federal election
Tas	Franklin	ALP	No
	Braddon	LIB	Yes
	Bass	LIB	Yes
	Lyons	ALP	Yes
Vic	Bendigo	ALP	No
	Corangamite	ALP	Yes
	Dunkley	ALP	Yes
	Corio	ALP	No
WA	Hasluck	LIB	Yes
	Pearce	LIB	Yes
	Swan	LIB	Yes
	Curtin	LIB	No
	Moore	LIB	No
	Cowan	ALP	Yes

Table 2 summarises the breakdown of the total number of participants in relation to key demographic details.

Table 2: Participant demographic details

State / territory	Total participants	Gender		CALD	ATSI
		F	M		
Qld	9	5	4	3 (33%)	
Vic	10	4	6	3 (30%)	
NSW	14	6	8	2 (25%)	1 (7%)
WA	8	4	4	3 (37.5%)	
SA	16	9	7	4 (44%)	
ACT	8	3	5	2 (25%)	
Tas	9	7	2	1 (16%)	1 (11%)
NT	10	7	3	1 (25%)	3 (30%)
Total	84	45 (54%)	39 (46%)	19 (28.5%) (15 LOTE 18%)	5 (6%)

All participants were Australian citizens as they were registered to vote in Australian elections. As Table 2 makes clear, about a third of participants also came from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, which is consistent with the general Australian population in this age group. In 2011, 25% of 12-24-year-olds in Australia were from a CALD background.¹⁰⁸ Participants who identified their cultural backgrounds described being Indian, Chinese, Hungarian, Portuguese, Kiwi, British, Malaysian, Taiwanese, French, German, Egyptian, Greek, Macedonian and Pakistani. 18% spoke different languages at home while growing up, including Hindi, Greek, Urdu, French, Portuguese, Mandarin and Malay.

6% of participants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, which is just above the population average of 5% for young Australians.¹⁰⁹

Participants worked in a wide array of occupations, as Table 3 demonstrates. All participants grew up in low- or middle-income households with parents working in 'low- or middle-prestige occupations', and about two-thirds of participants were working in a similar level job themselves. Occupational prestige is a sociological term used to measure a person's means of converting their level of education into income. Australian occupations are ranked in the AUSEI06 Socioeconomic Index for Australia (2009), using the Australian Bureau of Statistics' ANZSIC occupational codes. For the purposes of this study, we excluded participants whose parents could be included in the high prestige end of the 'professionals' category, which includes occupations such as lawyers, engineers, doctors, scientists, and academics and are likely to represent high levels of education, income and cultural and social capital.¹¹⁰

Table 3: Types of jobs held by participants

Primary job type (highest to lowest frequency)	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Professional roles (i.e. roles typically requiring at least a bachelor's degree)	18	21%
Students	12	14%
Administration (office-based roles that don't usually require a bachelor's degree)	10	12%
Caring roles (unqualified or low-level qualification)	9	11%
Retail workers	6	7%
Unemployed or declined to answer	6	7%
Hospitality workers	5	6%
Manual workers (including tradespeople)	5	6%
Teachers	4	5%
Allied health workers (minimum bachelor's degree required)	4	5%
Stay-at-home parents	2	2%
Self-employed	1	1%

Recruitment

Participants were recruited by specialist recruiting firms in each state and territory, using a range of on- and offline recruitment tools inviting 18-29-year-olds to participate in research about 'social issues' - participants were not advised in advance that they would be participating in a focus group about arts and culture, in order to avoid self-selection bias.¹¹¹ Upon nominating themselves for participation, they were then taken through a series of questions over the phone to determine whether they met the criteria for a 'young middle Australian'. If they did, they were asked a secondary set of questions as we had also set a series of quotas for the recruiters to meet. For example, more than 50% of participants needed to be from marginal federal electorates, CALD and ATSI participants needed to meet population averages, less than 20% could be full time students and less than 10% could be unemployed.

Data collection

Data collection occurred in online focus groups using the video conferencing platform Zoom. Most groups contained between three and six participants, in line with best practice for conducting focus groups via video that suggests smaller groupings than for face-to-face contexts. Groups were split along gender lines to encourage greater rapport between participants. Participants were reminded at the beginning of each group that the Zoom call was being video recorded (they had been informed at the recruitment stage), given an additional opportunity to opt out and reminded that they were free to opt out of the research at any time. All participants consented to these measures.

Data was collected over a 70- to 90-minute period with each group. The facilitator opened by asking participants to log in to an online audience participation tool called Menti. Here, participants were asked to write down every word that came to mind when they heard the term 'arts and culture'. These words were then used as prompts for participants to discuss their initial, top-of-mind reactions to this term.

Participants were then provided a link to a two-minute online survey showing a list of activities and were asked to select any activities they considered to be within their own definition

of 'arts and culture'. In addition to some traditional items like painting a watercolour or going to the ballet, the survey also included less traditional activities, such as:

- listening to the radio in your car
- filming yourself doing a dance taught to you by your grandparents, and then uploading it to TikTok
- singing the national anthem at a sporting event
- reading a novel
- playing a game on your phone
- watching a Hollywood blockbuster on Netflix.

Once all participants had submitted their surveys, the facilitator identified which of the activities were most polarising for the group and used these as prompts to explore the boundaries that participants put around their definitions of arts and culture. This generated debate in most groups, though the young middle Australian participants were more open to having their minds changed by other group members than we observed with middle Australians in 2020. Groups were then prompted to think about how their definitions might change if they were only asked to think about 'arts' or only asked to think about 'culture', and what the effects of using these two terms together might be.

Participants were asked about their own engagement with arts and cultural activities and whether they felt arts and culture had value to them, their friends and families, to society, to the economy and to jobs. They were asked how familiar they were with the term 'creative industries' and asked about their knowledge of operating models in those industries - that is, 'How do arts, cultural and creative institutions and individuals support themselves financially?' If government funding was not raised in this discussion, they were asked explicitly whether they thought governments played a role in financially supporting arts and culture. This was then followed up with questions about the advantages and disadvantages of giving arts and culture a funding boost and the advantages and disadvantages of cutting government funding to this policy area.

Conversations wrapped up with discussions of the importance of Australian content, Australian cultural heritage and hearing uniquely Australian stories and voices. The final question to each group asked participants whether they felt their perceptions of arts and culture had shifted in any direction or become strengthened or weakened over the course of the discussion.

Analysis

This study used an abductive approach to analysis, noting that the emergence of theories from the data typically builds on implicit theories developed at the research design stage. The focus group discussions were digitally recorded then transcribed verbatim. A top line coding hierarchy was developed out of the key themes and topics from the discussion guide. Then, through an iterative review of the transcripts as they were completed, two qualitative researchers developed a system of sub-codes to flesh out a coding frame specific to the data that had emerged. Once this coding frame had been tested on several different data items (i.e. focus group transcripts), it was then finalised ready for use in coding the data in the software package NVivo. Each transcript was coded using the coding frame as a starting point, while other codes emerged inductively through the analysis process. At that point, a third researcher was brought in to ensure inter-rater reliability. The use of this rigorous technique to manage the coding of focus groups ensures that findings are directly traceable to the raw data, thus providing a fully transparent and robust process with a high level of transferability.

The quotes presented throughout this report are not the only instances of each theme being mentioned; they merely exemplify the kinds of things participants were saying about that topic, as is typical in qualitative studies.

It should also be noted that this was not a comparative analysis between the variables along which the focus groups were split - i.e. gender and location. Themes that emerged through the analysis had to apply to all the focus groups to be considered worthy of note in the report. Decisions about both gender and location divides were made in consultation with the qualitative research consultants conducting the research on ANA's behalf.

Quote conventions

Throughout this report, we have provided verbatim examples of participants' contributions to the discussion. The following conventions have been applied to these quotes:

Convention	Description
Ellipses (...) used at the start, end or in the middle of a quote	Means that less relevant words or utterances have been removed from that location in the quote. Only done if it does not change the meaning of the quote.
Italics in a quote	Means the participant put extra emphasis on that word or phrase.
Use of quotation marks (" ") within a quote	Means the participant quoted someone else or used 'air quotes' (i.e. gestured quote marks with their fingers).
An en dash (-) in the middle of a quote	The participant paused briefly, and often this pause results in a change to the grammar of the sentence. May be used to denote an aside.
Square brackets ([]) before or during a quote	Information inside square brackets is not part of the quote but provides the reader with important context.

Each quote is followed by a description of that participant's demographic characteristics - gender, age, the state they are now living in, whether they identified as being culturally and/or linguistically diverse during the recruitment process and their main occupation at time of research. As with all of these demographic descriptors,

CALD status was self-described during recruitment (verbally answering the question 'How would you describe your cultural background?' during the phone screener), and descriptors are provided throughout the report in participants' own words, using a phrase like: (self-identifies as male, 25, Victorian, Anglo-Saxon, cleaner).

Appendix 3:

What we mean by arts, culture and creativity

ANA acknowledges the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and their continuing cultural and creative practices in this land. This reminds us of the importance of sharing knowledge, skills and stories.

We recognise that Australia's culture has been uniquely shaped by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, by the generations of people born in this place, and by the people from all around the globe who have made this place their home.

All these perspectives can help shape a cultural life that emboldens us. This aspiration informs ANA's definition of arts and culture, which is broad and inclusive. It includes activities like:

- attending cultural events in person (e.g. going to the movies, a festival, the symphony)
- visiting cultural venues in person (e.g. going to an art gallery or museum, visiting the war memorial, using libraries and archives)
- creating something (e.g. making something out of materials like wood, clay or wool, painting, photography or film-making, designing something on paper or on the computer, writing stories or poetry)
- performing something (e.g. singing, dancing, playing a musical instrument)
- engaging with arts, culture and creative content within one's own home (e.g. listening to music, watching TV, reading books, looking at art, visiting cultural venue websites, playing computer games).

Not all arts, cultural and creative activities appeal to all people, but most people feel that there is something within the category of 'arts and culture' that they enjoy and that is relevant and significant to them.

The word 'culture' has a lot of different meanings. We use 'culture' to refer to ways of living and everyday forms of expression and creativity that we either share as Australians or that we share with other members of our particular social groups or communities. In the words of participants from our 2020 middle Australia research:

Culture is belonging...where we feel we fit in.

We have an Australian culture. Even though there are many nationalities in it, we live the Australian way of life.

This research showed that when we use the terms '*arts*' and '*culture*' together as a collective term - '*arts and culture*' - this new term can take on a broader, more inclusive meaning than either word on its own.

We note also that arts and cultural activities can sit within the industrial category of the cultural and creative economy, which includes industries and occupations that use creativity for production and where cultural symbolism is evident in the finished product. This includes the kinds of activities outlined above, but also includes industries and occupations that may be less obvious, such as advertising, design and architecture.

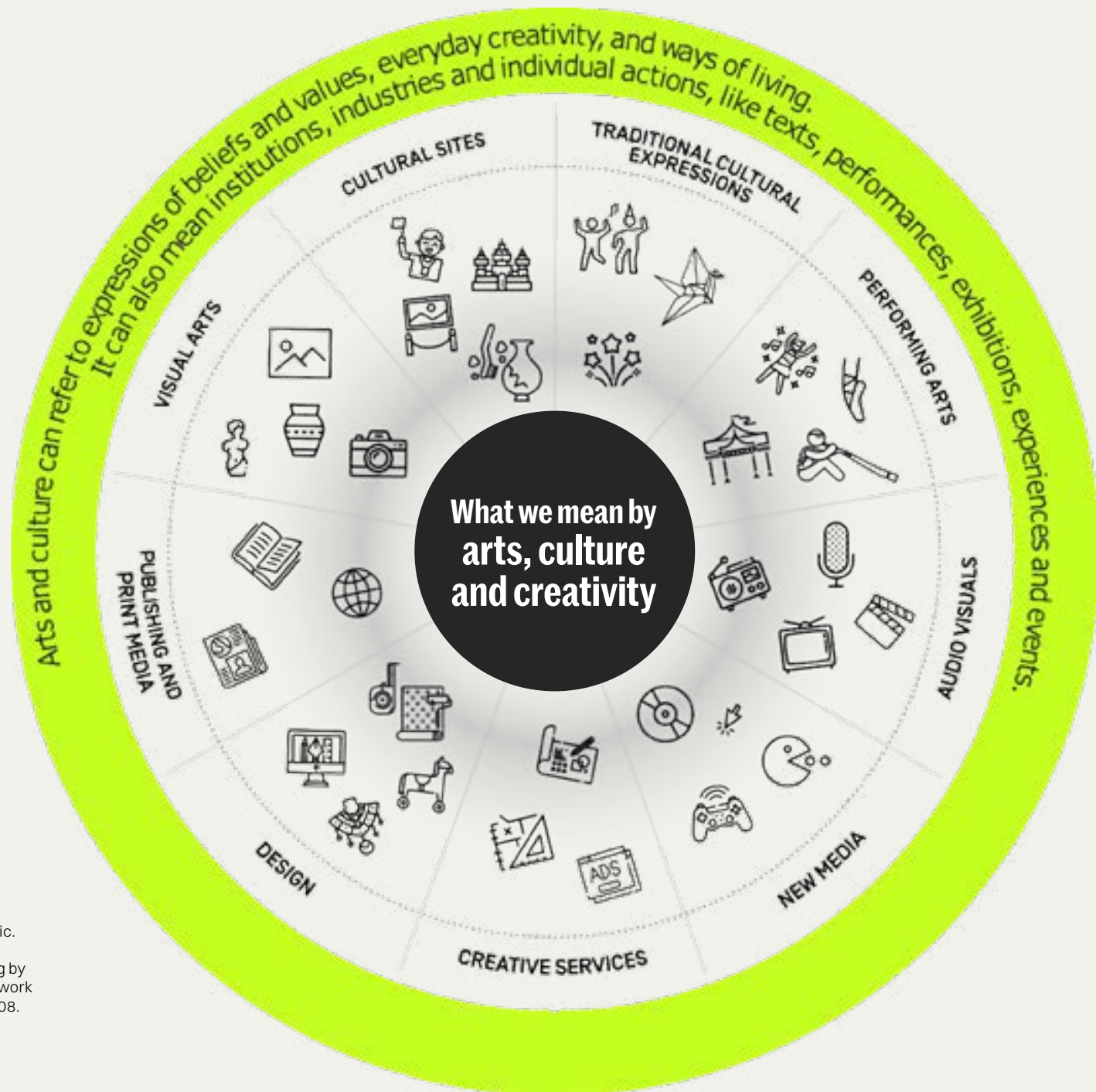


Figure 12: What we mean by arts, culture and creativity infographic. Source: Reproduced from Trembath and Fielding 2020, p. 163. Original was created using inputs from Australia's Cultural Funding by Government data series 2007-08 to 2017-18, the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics and UNCTAD's Creative Economy Report 2008.

Endnotes

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**A New Approach
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