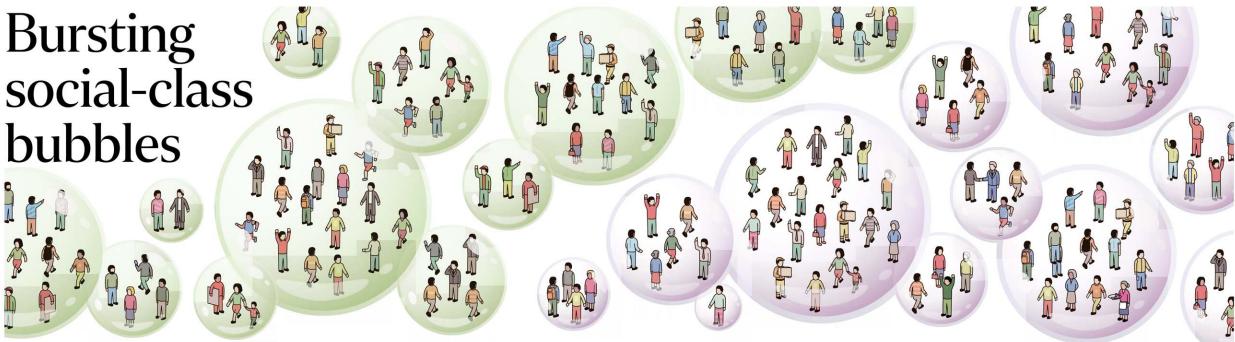


Source: The Straits Times, pB4-B6

Date: 21 January 2018



Is it true that Singaporeans do not mix across social class, as an Institute of Policy Studies investigates and finds out what can be done to bridge the class divide

about one friend or fewer who lives in private housing.

Those who study in elite schools also have far fewer links to those in non-elite schools, and vice versa.

This is troubling, said the study's researchers, because it suggests that Singapore is increasingly stratified along class lines: People are hanging out with "their own kind" along the lines of where they go to school and what kind of homes theylive in.

If such trends are not fixed, more and more Singapore are, while ex-

be living in separate bubbles based on their socio-economic status.

This, in turn, will lead to a fractured society.

Say the researchers: "Having adisverse network (whether on race, religion or status) increases the variety and richness of one's experiences and knowledge beyond one's own group, and this facilitates thinking in national terms, rather than narrowly in terms of only one's own group and its interests."

The trio of researchers are National University of Singapore

rector Gillian Koh.
Associate Professor Chua puts it
thus to Insight: "What starts as a person-to-person relationship leads to
benefiting the larger society. We
build a society, one tie at a time." While urging individuals to do their bit, the researchers say the Government and community lead-ers need to do more to encourage

Ng Jun Sen and Amelia Teng

When former Raffles Girls' School
(RGS) student Sinead Tan went to
fashion school two years ago, she
felt like she had plunged into a different Singapore where people had
vastly different concerns.

As the 21-year-old listened to her
new classmares at Lasalle College
of the Arts – most of whom were
polytechnic graduates – talk about
applying for bursaries, she realised
that many did not speak English at
listed the special mixed of the composition of the

make friends or shun people be-cause they are from certain types of schools."

Some do see their social circles

TGOES WITH THE TERRITORY

lar status. The cycle continues with their next generation because they enrol their children in their alma mater, due to familiarity and prosimity of the schools to their Bukit Timah bungalows".

Residents in private condominiums say there is little need to head to public swimming pools or gyms when their properties already have such facilities. When former Raffles Girls' School
(RGS) student Sinead Tan went to
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Sport is regarded as a way to bring people of different backgrounds together. Recognising this the Government has long ensured that there are affordable options. PHOTO: DIOS WINCOY JR FOR THE. SUNDAY TIMES

are organised.

Over the last five years, between 17 and 20 per cent of participants in

17 and 20 per cent of participants in PA and grassroots programmes live in private estates, says a PA spokesman. This proportion mirrors the national breakdown of 20 per cent who live in private property. Ancedotally though, public housing residents seem to be far more enthusiastic than private home residents. dents in taking part in grassroots ac-

dents in taking part in grassroots ac-tivities.

West Coast Park Neighbourhood
Committee chairman Prakash Ku-mar Hetamsaria, 51, says NCs and
RCs do organise large-scale joint events, such as National Day cele-brations or Chinese New Year din-ners, but they often see a much larger turnout from HDB residents. One challenge is down to access. Ms Joan Pereira, an MP for Tan-jong Pagar GRC and Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) member for Culture, Community and Youth, says it is harder to reach out to private estate dwellers as their gated communities create a 'barrier' between residents and grassroots leaders.

By contrast, RC centres can be set

By contrast, RC centres can be set

Another factor is that wealthier residents are simply 'busiter'
Tampines Changkat Community Centre assistant secretary Abdul Rashid, 64, a grassroots volunteers ince 1984, says: "(Wealthier residents assistant secretary) Abdul Rashid, 64, a grassroots volunteers ince 1984, says: "(Wealthier residents) say they have less time to spare, so as volunteers our approach must be more persuasive, explaining our programmes in away that makes them feel well-come to join the rest of the community."

About half are Singaporeans and way that makes them feel well-come to join the rest of the community."

With some patient persuasion, be says some endup joining their ranks as grassroots volunteers. Their participation is invaluable as they bring a for for Culture, Community and Youth, says that once a sport be solve have made their marka abusines leaders.

SPORTS LEVEL PLAVING FIELD

Sports is another rallying point. A 2015 study by national sports agency Sport Singapore is agency Sport Singapore is agency Sport Singapore is a deliberate despite their different backager our form the special of the sport of the state of the sport of the common for all kinds of the sport of th

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Special report: Social mixing across class lines

Singaporeans are not mixing much with people from different classes, a recently published study by the Institute of Policy Studies has found. Insight looks at two real-life stories of friendships formed – both within and outside of traditional social circles.

He made 'different' types of friends through NS

Amelia Teng Education Correspondent

At theage of 24, Mr Shaun Lim's social circle consists mainly of his friends from university and junior

rnends from university and junior college.

The final-year law student from the National University of Singa-pore (NUS) graduated from top schools, including Raffles Insti-tution and Nanyang Primary School

"Most of the people in law have similar backgrounds. I have a classmate from polytechnic but she's an exception," says Mr

His experience reflects a study finding that the type of school influences the type of friends you make, that people who come from "elite" schools tend to mix with their own

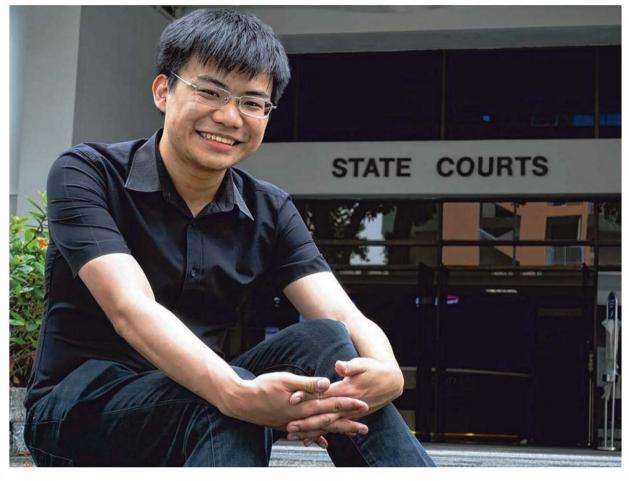
Indeed, Mr Lim's first extended experience of people from other backgrounds came when he under-took that rite of passage, national service, where he was posted to lead an infantry unit.
"It was quite a different experi-

ence from basic military training and Specialist Cadet School. There were the Hokkien-speaking guys, it was almost like (local comedy) Army Daze but a lot less funny," he

says.

But beyond the army, hardly any opportunity arose for Mr Lim – whose father is between jobs and mother is a bank manager – to make friends with people from

other types of schools. He took part in a few inter-



school camps as part of the National Police Cadet Corps when he was younger.

"We were put in groups of peo-ple from different schools from our geographical area, but there was still a tendency to mingle with friends from your own school," he

A week of camp is also not enough to develop close friendships, he adds. "The ties are just not as strong as those you form from studying together for a year or

Academics say it is natural that people form stronger connections with others they meet in their for-

mative schooling years.
Education policy expert Jason
Tan says: "By default, and by no one's fault, the school trajectory you take narrows the kind ofpeople you see every day."
He adds: "Schools are actively do-

ing their part to encourage stu-dents to be aware of the larger society, through subjects like social udies, community service, interschool activities and overseas trips.
"But some of these activities are

periodic and of short duration, so the difficulty is in ensuring they have longer-lasting impact beyond their completion."

REACHING OUT BEYOND FRIEND CIRCLE

But Mr Lim - an only child who lives with his family in a Bedok con-dominium – does not live in a com-plete bubble.

He has spent much of histime as a volunteer at the State Courts, help-ing train his juniors and building a programme where law students help the public understand pro-cesses like filing claims and applying for court orders.

For his efforts, he won the Pro Bono Leadership Award from NUS and the Outstanding Court Volun teer Award in the student category

Since 2014, he has also been helping out with weekly Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) in Buona

"I do try to be mindful that people "I do try to be mindful that people don't always come from similar backgrounds. As an MPS volunteer, I do have a sense of the circumstances that less privileged families go through," says Mr Lim.

He adds: "A classless society is not possible, but those from less well-off-backgroundsmust feel that

well-offbackgroundsmust feel that social mobility is possible, that they have enough opportunities to move

ateng@sph.com.sg

Law student Shaun Lim volunteers at the helping train his juniors and building a where law students help understand lega processes





When a company director meets an ex-convict

Ng Jun Sen

He is a former convict and a secondary school dropout who has spent around two decades in and

out of prison for drug offences. She is a Hwa Chongalumna, a master's graduate who studied in the United States and now sits on the boards of directors of a dozen firms

Despite living in two different worlds, Mr Joel Lee Hong Seng, 49, and Madam Lorinne Kon, 52, are close friends who enjoy each other's company, often reminiscing over tea at a coffee shop near his flat or listening to sermons to-

gether in church.
With a recent study concluding that Singaporeans do not mix across social classes, their genuine friendship is a statistical anomaly.

The study found that Singapore-

ans' social circles tend to be limited to those who live in similar types of housing and have similar educational backgrounds. Those who participate in religious organisations or volunteer for social causes, how-

ever, are more likely to expand their circles across such divides. Mr Lee now lives alone in a one-room rental flat in Jalan Besar. But for nearly seven years, his home was Cluster A2 of Changi Prison. In stark contrast, Madam Kon,

who is married with two children, lives in a 1,600 sq ft condominium unit in Balestier.

Now a delivery driver, a job he found thanks to the help of Madam Kon and other friends at Paya Lebar Methodist Church, Mr Lee says his life of crime and drugs is over - all because of a chance encounterin 2014.

Then, she was one of three Thursday volunteers with Prison Fellowship Singapore (PFS), which conducts regular weekday Bible classes for inmates. Says Mr Lee in Mandarin: "She sat next to me during the Bible classes, so when there was a passage that I couldn't understand, I would ask Lorinne." Her first memory of Mr Lee is of him asking thoughtful questions, and of his attentiveness in these classes. He would also shush others when their attention lapsed, reminding them that the volunteers were

thereeveryweekout of goodwill. Technically, the PFS programme ends when the inmate is released. But Madam Kon continued to keep in touch with him.

Their shared religion kept them connected at first, but eventually both found another common cause: to make sure Mr Lee stays clear of harmful substances as he

re=enters society.

"As soon as I came out, I have my old friends asking me to go (drink)

Martell," says Mr Lee, referring to a brand of cognac. "But for the first time, I told them

no. I have other friends now. I no

longer hang out with those guys."

From time to time, she would share with him information on job opportunities.

He would also call her for help in navigating bureaucracy, such as which MP to contact when his late father suffered a fall, leaving him

with unpaid medical bills to clear. Madam Kon says she arranged for him to meet his MP Denise Phua, and accompanied him to the social service office near his flat to

apply for financial assistance.
The reality of being poor in Singa-

pore was not something she had been exposed to before. By her own admission, Madam

Kon is privileged. She was chauf-feured to school as a child in the 1970s, received an overseas education and has lived without fear of

poverty.

"All my life, I have never been taught the value of saving for a rainy day. It was after I met him that I realised certain things that are so inconsequential to me, like spend-ingmoney, mean so much to him. "Our world views are so different,

and I have learnt so much from Hong Seng," she says.

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