

More identify with S'pore than their ethnicity

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Of 2,020 people surveyed, more identify with Singapore than their own ethnic lineage.

Some 35 per cent of respondents in a new study on ethnic identity by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and Channel News-Asia indicated this inclination as opposed to 14.2 per cent who chose their ethnic identity alone.

However, the data also reflected that almost half - or 49 per cent of respondents - felt they had a "simultaneous" Singaporean and ethnic identity.

On what comprised an ethnic identity, researchers noted that overall, the three major races ranked reading, writing and speaking in the community's language, and celebrating their community's main festivals, as important markers of ethnic identity.

Nearly 92 per cent of Chinese regarded the celebration of Chinese New Year as at least somewhat important, as did 95.9 per cent of Malays when it came to Hari Raya Puasa, and 88.2 per cent of Indians for Deepavali.

Respondents were also near unanimous in their agreement that the ability to read or write in an individual's ethnic language (93.3 per cent) and converse in one's ethnic language (94 per cent) is at least somewhat important to be passed down to future generations.

However, the erosion of ethnic traditions and heritage also surfaced. For instance, millennials placed less importance on the ability to cook ethnic food and enjoy ethnic art and music.

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And while respondents valued their own ethnic identities, researchers found that inter-ethnic engagement was somewhat lacking.

For instance, despite interest expressed in inter-cultural exchanges, a fair number of respondents do not participate in the cultural practices of those from other races, leading researchers to say that Singapore is "still not the multicultural nirvana that some would expect".

For instance, 53 per cent of Chinese respondents said they participated in Malay festivals and 44 per cent of them took part in Indian ones.

Similarly, more than half of the Malay respondents said that they participated in Chinese and Indian festivals.

In the case of Indian respondents, more than 60 per cent said they took part in Chinese and Malay festivals.

IPS senior research fellow Mathew Mathews said that given the current levels of inter-cultural exchange, "it is worth considering if more can be done to promote greater interaction, engagement and learning across the racial groups".