

## ESSAY

### Byproducts of a Suppressed Hobby

This reaction occurs at room temperature, catalyzed by the hands of creative hosts.

art  $\rightarrow$  fulfillment

Like many other creative individuals, I have always harbored a deep passion for art. My mother often found the white walls of her hallways marked up with crayons and dry-erase marker drawings. My art was taped to the kitchen fridge, piled on the table, or hung on the doors. From the moment I was born until middle school, I could never resist the urge to draw. My fingers itched to hold a pen, and my heart yearned for one.

At its core, the reaction appears straightforward: creativity brings the host fulfillment. However, as the host matures, an additional reactant is introduced, disrupting the equilibrium. They must engage in work and study to prepare for a promising future. The reaction involving the synthesis of study and art is illustrated below.

study + art  $\rightarrow$  mediocrity

Mediocrity. This reaction is balanced very poorly. Mediocre grades, mediocre art, mediocre results. Like flowers on a windowsill watered sporadically, never given the consistent care they need to bloom. No flower blooms when it is nurtured and then ignored, left barely alive, only to be nurtured once again.

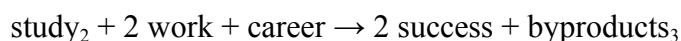
I first recognized my mediocrity when I received several low grades my freshman year, one after another. The accumulating numbers on my transcript forced my hands away from my sketchbook and onto a notebook. I stood at the door of my chemistry classroom, glancing between the numbers on my phone and the other classmates. I thought, at the time, that the culprit of my downfall was art, and I had to put it aside to succeed. *Is this all I can do?*

As a result, I discarded all of my flowers.

Under the pressures of unfulfilled ambition, another reaction occurs. The host, caught in a reluctant game of tug-of-war between responsibilities and passion, tries to stabilize the system. To reach equilibrium, they sacrifice their creativity as an act of survival.

The following reaction occurs in a restricted, closed system at room temperature and 1 atm of pressure. This equation is rewritten by expectation. The equation depicts the reaction of study<sub>2</sub>, work, and career, to obtain success.

However, this reaction is not ideal. Several unintended byproducts are also formed.



The unintended byproducts are as follows.

#### I. Dry paint.

Along my artistic journey, I decided that black and white was not enough. I needed colors in my work. I picked up painting. Painting was the easiest way for me to destress. The texture of the thick paste that could be diluted to any desirable texture was comforting. Colors could be formed at the mercy of my brush. With paint, my art was in my hands.

A couple of months into my so-called “art detox” I revisited my paint containers. To my horror, the paint had dried out. The once glossy syrup had now lost its life, crumbling and cracking. *I must fix this*, I thought. I rushed to the bathroom to get a glass of water. *There’s no way my paints are ruined*. I poured water on them. They crumbled further. The water pooled uselessly atop the dry paints, refusing to mix. Was this the result of neglect?

#### II. Compensating creative time.

When I stopped giving myself time to express myself creatively, I slowly found ways to find it. I would tune out lectures and soak my notes with drawings. My teacher’s voice would

fade out, and my hand would begin dancing on my papers. Distracted, disconnected, diluted, I was unable to answer questions when I was called on. I could no longer find my way through practice problems. I would look up nervously, with a tight grip on my pen.

“Could you please repeat the question?” I ask, barely audible. My teacher says something. I look down at my notes for a sign, a clue, something to get me through. The class sits silently, waiting. I murmur something. I try to speak, but nothing comes out. I think to myself: *art has ruined me*.

### III. Guilt after drawing.

Instead of drawing in class, I looked to create designated times in the week to draw. But somehow, after months of suppressing my creativity, I could find none in these times. The pages lay in front of me. Blank. Silent. I could not bring myself to draw.

And for many sessions following, I struggled. Sometimes, I would be able to plot down a circle. Sometimes, a line. And sometimes, nothing at all. I would sit and stare at the paper. Afterward, I felt guilty. *You're wasting your time*. The guilt consumed me, and eventually, I stopped drawing altogether. Days turned into weeks, and my sketchbook remained shut. The quiet absence of art should have brought me relief, yet it only left an empty space where creativity used to thrive. Without it, I felt like a machine—efficient, studious, but unfulfilled. I had done everything I thought was necessary for success, yet I had never felt further from it.

Byproducts. Residue from a reaction forced into balance. Proof of a suppressed hobby.

Nearing the midterm season of my sophomore year, I had fallen ill to the consequences of conquering my creativity.

At my lowest point, I wondered: Success...what is success? Can I redefine it in this equation?

What if success isn't a high GPA, an Ivy League college, or a millionaire lifestyle?

Perhaps not everyone's goal in life was to live lavishly. Success could also be defined as living satisfyingly, with decent grades, no fear of the future, and doing what one loves to do.

So, I put it to the test—and it worked. In addition, no byproducts are formed. The final reaction is depicted below.

$$\text{study} + \text{art} \rightarrow \text{success}$$

Without the weight of my standards on my shoulders, I began drawing again. I had to work to light my fire again. My motivation, passion, and skills fluctuated. But I hoped that no matter what, I could be okay with drawing.

Success was never a formula to be balanced. It was meant to be rewritten. No byproducts. No suppression. Just a reaction that was always meant to be.