

# The Happiness You Want

**Chiang Wai Fong**

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MY five-year old daughter attends a kindergarten organised by the Kampung Senang Charity and Education Foundation, and often brings home with her songs with meaningful lyrics encompassing good values. Recently she has been singing one entitled “The Face of Happiness”, and the lyrics are translated below:

*Is happiness around me? Why do I not see it?  
Is happiness around you? Let me take a look at its face  
I've searched my house many times, but all I find is the warmth and comfort of my room  
My father says that happiness lies in the mirror, where my happy face is reflected upon  
M teacher tells me that if I yearn for less, I will be happier  
We should always bear in mind to care for the Earth's resources  
With kindness and courtesy, I can see happiness in everyone's faces*

Happiness is what most of us strive for in our lifetime; to many, it is also the motivational force for work and study. The purpose and meaning of happiness is often discussed in the country. However, most people do not realise that happiness is just around them, and in their own reflections in the mirror, shaped by their inner wants and states of mind.

The Institute of Policy Studies organised the “Young Singaporeans Conference” on 26 September, it provided 25- to 35-year old Singaporeans with a platform to discuss the topic of happiness. Through keynote speeches and role-playing workshops, participants discussed the types of happiness they want, and the ways of achieving it. In one of the segments of the conference, participants were asked to think about what happiness means to them, and then draw up a personal “Happiness” mind map each.

The Mind Map was first conceived by British psychologist Tony Buzan. It mimics the thought processes of the human brain through a central idea with branches and sub-branches of related thoughts. Mind maps are usually constructed using words, pictures, colours, symbols and relationships. This differs from most other linear thinking maps. The purpose of mind-mapping is to form associations, strengthen thoughts organisation, and to improve photographic memory. Some secondary schools and tertiary institutions in Singapore offer courses on mind-mapping. Using this technique to map out one's happiness would better portray the emotional as well as logical aspects of one's thought processes.

Forty-one completed Mind Maps were collected on the day of the conference. Several interesting trends can be observed from the data obtained. Firstly, more than half of the mind maps were rather simple, with few main branches depicting the happiness components of providing for oneself, family harmony, health for loved ones, and a fulfilling job. No ideological

pursuits, 5Cs goals nor materialistic wants were included. Secondly, after collating the data from these forty-one individual Mind Maps onto an overall Mind Map, the depiction of Happiness for Young Singaporeans featured the greatest concern in the area of "Self", with the most sub-branches spreading out densely. The other five branches that categorises the Happiness for Young Singaporeans are 'Family', 'Work', 'Society', 'Community', 'Nation' and 'Environment'. This shows that young Singaporeans find that these areas bear the most impact on their level of personal happiness. Among them, 'Family' has the most branches while 'Environment' has the least. Thirdly, participants at the conference seemed to place much emphasis on values. For example, values like honesty, care, compassion and humility appeared under the 'Self' branch. Societal liveability, level of freedom, social cohesion and democracy also seems to have important places in the participants' personal happiness. In addition, happiness is also about having a sense of belonging to the nation and one's own family. There is also a call to review the relevance of the current conception of family values in Singapore society today.

The results are encouraging. It contradicts the common perception of youth as being overly self-absorbed, and obsessed with materialistic pursuits. According to one of the presenters, a survey that was done locally last year showed that those who are 25- to 35- year olds are the least happy, and had the lowest life satisfaction. Extrapolating observations from the overall Happiness mind map, although our youths seem to care most about their 'Self' when thinking about happiness, there are mainly realistic and within means. In fact, many of the sub-branches stress the importance of self-actualisation, accumulating life experiences through travelling, learning new skills, and spiritual development. Participants also displayed interest in developing the community, society and nation, so as to achieve equal rights for all citizens. This Happiness mind map provides important and interesting findings for policy makers to not only get a clearer understanding of what young Singaporeans want, but also to examine where and what has caused the missing link between what they want for happiness and what has been achievable for them.

Although everyone wishes to be happy, not all of us are satisfied with the happiness that we have. As the song lyrics say, satisfaction and need are inversely related. As one rises, the other drops – A simple concept. But as highlighted by one of the speakers, most people know it but few truly comprehend it or are able to realise it in action. The lyrics also say that happiness is built upon social interaction. If you treat others with kindness and compassion, you may start to see things from a different and more positive perspective. We are habitually focused on our lack of satisfaction, but oblivious to the fact that opportunities to be happy are all around us. A young executive at the conference asked how we can bring social care and cohesion into the workplace. One of the speakers suggested having cooking sessions during lunch. He purported that this would greatly change the dynamic in the office and the relationships and interactions among colleagues.

It remains to be seen whether or not a child's wish for happiness would grow with his or her age. However, it is clear that happiness requires the fertilisation of persistent inner strength, the courage to change, and bountiful creativity.

(The author is a research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies)

(This article is translated from the original in Chinese by IPS Research Assistant Zhou Rongchen)