

AUDIO SCRIPT

[F1: Female Student; M1: Male Student]

F1: Hi, Tony. How was the Happiness Seminar?

M1: Hi, Stephanie. It was interesting, thanks. I learned a lot.

F1: Such as?

M1: Well, prior to the seminar, I had never heard of the happiness equation. I didn't know there was a mathematical equation to measure happiness.

F1: You mean happiness is measurable?

M1: Yeah, it is. British researchers developed the equation after observing a group of 26 people in a study. The people had to complete a decision-making task and their choices led to a financial gain or loss. As they did the task, they were asked to rate their level of happiness while their mental activity was measured with an MRI. The researchers assessed the results and formulated an equation. Then they used the equation to analyze data from more than 18,000 participants worldwide.

F1: Are you saying that people from all over the world were part of the study? How?

M1: The researchers collected the data by using a smartphone app.

F1: So the researchers discovered what makes people happy. Well, what *does* make people happy?

M1: It all comes down to *expectations*.

F1: If I understand you correctly, expecting something good to happen makes us happy.

M1: Yeah. Expecting and anticipating makes people happy. It also depends on what we expect and how strongly we expect it. For example, some people keep their expectations low and then they're really happy if their expectations are exceeded.

F1: So, if I *didn't* expect to pass an exam and then passed it, I would be much happier than if I *did* expect to pass an exam and passed it.

M1: That's right. People who have low expectations about the future are called pessimists. And people who have high expectations are ...

F1: Optimists. Yes, I know that.

M1: Well, it turns out that pessimists are happier, healthier, and live longer than optimists.

F1: No way! Are you saying it's better to be pessimistic than optimistic?

M1: It can be. German researchers studied more than 11,000 participants who provided information about their current level of happiness on a scale of 1 to 10. The participants also had to predict how happy they would be five years in the future. People between the age of 18 and 39 overestimated their future happiness by about half a point. People over 65 overestimated their future *unhappiness* by two-thirds of a point.

F1: Wait a minute. So you're saying that older people are more pessimistic than younger people, but they're happier?

M1: Yes, older people are less optimistic, but more realistic. They are generally happier and less stressed. Then the instructor demonstrated something she'd learned as a psychology major at Harvard. She held up a glass half full of water. We expected her to ask who sees the glass as being half full or half empty.

F1: To find out who's an optimist and who's a pessimist ...

M1: Right, but instead she asked us how heavy we thought the glass was. People suggested various weights, like 10 ounces or a pound. Then she said that the weight doesn't matter, that it depends on *how long* you hold the glass for. If you hold it for a short time, it's not heavy at all. If you hold it for an hour, it starts to feel heavy. And if you hold it *all day*, your arm will really hurt.

F1: So, she meant that the glass of water is like a problem? The longer you worry about a problem, the more it can hurt you?

M1: Exactly. And the older you get, the more you learn to put the glass down instead of holding onto it. So, the seminar gave me a lot of food for thought. Speaking of food, do you want to get a sandwich?

F1: Sure!