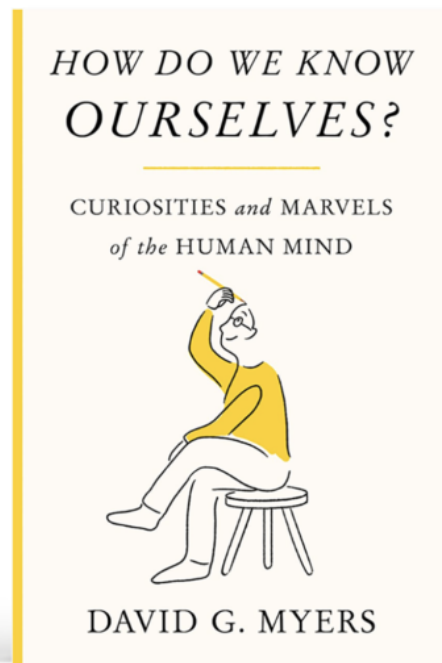


Why Is Everyone Else Having More Fun? Part 2 of 3 With David Myers

November 10, 2022



David Myers, a social psychologist and professor of psychology at Hope College in Michigan, joined us in the last episode to speak about his latest book, [*How Do We Know Ourselves? Curiosities and Marvels of the Human Mind*](#). In this episode, he and APS's Ludmila Nunes discuss the second section of the book, which focuses on who we are, and takes a closer look at a chapter called "Why is everyone else having more fun?"

[Read more about David Myers's new book, including an excerpt of the chapter Failure and Flourishing.](#)

Unedited Transcript

[00:00:12.490] – Ludmila Nunes

David Myers, a social psychologist and professor of psychology at Hope College in Michigan, joined us in the last episode to speak about his latest book *How Do We Know OurSelves Curiosities and Marvels of the Human Mind*. This book of essays is divided into three parts. The first part. Who am I? And this one focuses on the self. The second one. Who are we? This part explores our relationships. And finally, a third part, What in the World? which takes a psychological eye to the larger world around us.

In the last episode, we got to know David's extensive and interesting career a bit better. We learned how he hopes to help to save the world from misinformation and help his readers and students to think critically and at the same time also help them to savor the world, to develop a sense of wonder and respect for the human creature. We also talked about the first part of his book, Who Am I? And specifically about the chapter that gives the title to the book How Do We Know Ourselves? David spoke about how we know ourselves through our behaviors and how those behaviors can even change our emotions.

[00:01:28.460] – Ludmila Nunes

Today we invited David Myers to join us again to speak about the second section of his book, Who Are We? It's great to have you back, David.

[00:01:39.270] – David Myers

Thank you Ludmila. It's an honor to be here with you.

[00:01:43.010] – Ludmila Nunes

So today we are talking about the second part of your book, Who Are We? In which you explore how we relate to others. And I chose the chapter. Why is everyone else having more fun? To guide our conversation. Why is the grass always greener on the other side. Why do we perceive others lives as being more fun, more interesting, basically more socially active than ours? Do people really see others as having more fun?

[00:02:12.110] – David Myers

So that's a good question and one our listeners can ask themselves do your friends seem to be having more fun than you are? Does their romantic life seem more exciting than yours? That's a question that Sebastian Derry at Cornell University asked across eleven studies of university students, people in malls, online respondents. And his consistent answer across these eleven studies was yes, other people seem to be having more fun. Their social lives seem more active, they party more, they dine out more, they have more friends. Or so it seems.

[00:02:48.260] – Ludmila Nunes

So it seems. And why does it seem that way? Does it have maybe a lot to do to what we know about other people's lives versus what we know about ours, which is every second, every moment of our lives?

[00:03:02.590] – David Myers

Yeah, indeed. That's what Derry was proposing in his research that our social perceptions suffer from biased information availability. We compare ourselves to what's mentally accessible and so we tend to hear more about our friends activities than their non events. They're non activities. And social comparison is really at the heart of what drives our selfconceptions. If others seem to be poor, we feel richer. If we're around people who are clutchy, we feel a little more athletic, but we also often compare

upward. And we look at others who seem to be more successful, more popular. They're happier. That's what they're publicizing about themselves, and it makes us feel a little bad.

[00:03:47.130] – Ludmila Nunes

So social media seems to play a huge role on this.

[00:03:51.280] – David Myers

Social media does seem to play a huge role, and that's led to a lot of research on the effects of social media. Two things have happened simultaneously in the United States in particular, and in other countries as well. One, there's been an explosion in people's time spent on screens. The number of smartphones quadrupled from 2010 to 2020. Simultaneously, mood disorders, particularly among teens and young Americans, skyrocketed. I was just looking at these data yesterday, the latest data. Twelve to 17 year olds and 18 to 25 year olds in the United States both experienced about an 8% annual rate of major depressive disorder in 2010 and in 2020, that had doubled to approximately 16% in each of those teen and young adult groups experiencing a major depressive disorder during the past year. That's an unprecedented increase in psychological problems. And along with that, we've seen suicide, ideation, loneliness, and it's really a mental health crisis. My own school is looking at hiring additional people towards Counseling and Psychological Services Center, for example, as are many colleges and universities, which are seeing on the ground the effects of this. So is that a mere coincidence? That's something researchers are exploring.

[00:05:21.560] – Ludmila Nunes

We've had a lot of new research published in the APS journals precisely about this how the use of social media can influence, wellbeing, mental health. It seems that there's not a clear answer to that. And maybe the problem is not in using social media per se, but more how people use it, right?

[00:05:48.040] – David Myers

Well, yes, and how much they use it. So we have three kinds of studies that have been published by APS and other journals as well. Some are correlational studies. They simply ask, is social media use associated with mental health, particularly among teens? And the outcomes do vary. And there's some disagreement here, but it looks like once your usage daily increases beyond a couple hours to 4 hours or more, for example, then we see increased rates of mental health issues. Gene Twenge, who's the co author my social site text has written in her book I Gen, that teens who visit social networking sites every day but see their friends in person less frequently are the most likely to agree. With statements like a lot of the time I feel lonely, or I feel left out of things, or I wish I had more good friends. So that's one kind of study just correlating one social media diet with your mental health. A second kind of study is longitudinal. It tracks lives through time to ask does today's social media use predict people's mental health tomorrow? And here we have fewer studies. But some, not all, answer the question yes.

[00:07:04.140] – David Myers

And then the third type of study is a true experiment where we get volunteers randomly assigned them to either a normal social media diet just go on doing like you've been doing or to a restricted social media

diet, maybe a Facebook fast, for example, for four weeks, as was done in one study with 30 volunteers. And by and large, although this again some mixed results, those studies indicate that restricting one's social media exposure and the social comparisons that come with it does improve people's morale and their mental health.

[00:07:40.090] – Ludmila Nunes

So this restriction of the use of social media might be reducing the comparisons that people make regarding others.

[00:07:47.970] – David Myers

Absolutely. And one other effect of restraining one's screen time is just a timing effect. It's not social comparison. If we're spending 4 hours or more looking at a screen on our social media feeds in a day, that's time sucking. That means we're spending that much less time doing other things in face to face relationships, sleeping, studying, whatever else we spend our life doing. And so there may be an opportunity cost to all the activities that are displaced by extensive screen time. At least that's what people like John Height and Jane Twinkie are surmising.

[00:08:26.140] – Ludmila Nunes

Exactly. We are even spending less and less time doing fun things while we are just sitting on our couches scrolling through social media.

[00:08:35.810] – David Myers

You know, as an example of that, when I was teaching classes regularly, I often taught 75 minutes classes twice a week and so I would have a break in the middle of a class. This is before smartphones and it would be a social time. Everybody would talk to each other for five or ten minutes and it was hard to get their attention back. More recently, I lectured during the 75 minutes class. The instructor declared a five minute break and it was silent. Everybody got out their phones and was just sitting there scrolling through their social media feeds. And I thought how sad they could be connecting with one another and making relationships and friendships. It's a different world we live in today.

[00:09:15.110] – Ludmila Nunes

So how can we overcome these issues with social media? What's the advice that psychological scientists can give?

[00:09:25.760] – David Myers

Well, I think first information helps. And to know this reality can help us live intentionally to make conscious choices about our own use of time and to use social media intentionally in a way that is interactive and connects us with other people and not just passively. So that's one thing we can do. And then John Hyde and Gene Twinkie have advice for parents too. John, for example, advises parents to keep screens out of bedrooms, to not welcome their kids onto social media until at least high school, and to put some daily limit on the amount of screen time like 2 hours or so. And a parent can program a

phone, so it only allows a child a certain number of time on the phone. And Jean twinkie, she offers much the same advice. No phones or tablets in the bedroom at night, no use of devices within an hour of bedtime. And 2 hours or less of screen time per day is a good rule of thumb for teens and numb school kids. Gene advisors.

[00:10:27.410] – Ludmila Nunes

And most of these studies have been done with teenagers and children. But I would dare to say that this is a problem affecting everybody, because we also see older generations getting so used to their phones, especially when people retire, they don't have anything else to do. And they're also on Facebook, on social media. Are there any studies on those generations?

[00:10:54.860] – David Myers

Yes, we have studies, first of all, tracking the mental health of older adults versus younger adults over time. And people over 50 have had quite stable mental health, with about 5% or so having a major depressive episode during the prior year. And this has been true and still is true across time. Also during COVID I would have thought younger adults might have fared better because they had social media. They may have been quarantined, but they could still connect, whereas older adults were quarantined and weren't so adept at social media. But in fact, older adults were more resilient during COVID their mental health was younger adults suffered much greater increase in rates of depression and loneliness. We bounced back. I mean, we're resilient. We're past that now, so there are agerelated trends. But I also want to say you're right, there's controversy about this research, this screen time mental health relationship. Other researchers aren't totally persuaded, but the burden is on them to give us an alternative explanation. What accounts for the drastic rise in youth and young adult rates of depression over this thin slice of history is screen time and social media exposure. And all the social comparison and time sucking effects of that isn't what's at work.

[00:12:13.290] – David Myers

What is it? And what can be done to protect and improve youth and young adult? Wellbeing, that's a pressing question for our time.

[00:12:22.160] – Ludmila Nunes

So this is still an open question and more research needs to be developed. But psychologists are already exploring this connection between screen time mood disorders well being.

[00:12:35.370] – David Myers

Yes, and it's a healthy professional debate and I think further research will give us more resolution.

[00:12:42.410] – Ludmila Nunes

This is Ludmila Nunes with APS and I've been speaking to David Myers, author of the book *How Do We Know Ourselves? Curiosities and marvels of the human mind*. Today we talked about how we know our relationships. Specifically, why do we think everyone else is having more fun than us. Come back

for the next episode of under the Cortex to hear us speak about how we understand the world around us. Specifically how in certain fields, including scientific and academic areas, only victories are visible and the dangers of not making our failures more visible.

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