



# Learned Helplessness: A Theory for the Age of Personal Control

*Christopher Peterson, Steven F. Maier, Martin E. P. Seligman*

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When experience with uncontrollable events gives rise to the expectation that events in the future will also elude control, disruptions in motivation, emotion, and learning may ensue. "Learned helplessness" refers to the problems that arise in the wake of uncontrollability. First described in the 1960s among laboratory animals, learned helplessness has since been applied to a variety of human problems entailing inappropriate passivity and demoralization. While learned helplessness is best known as an explanation of depression, studies with both people and animals have mapped out the cognitive and biological aspects. The present volume, written by some of the most widely recognized leaders in the field, summarizes and integrates the theory, research, and application of learned helplessness. Each line of work is evaluated critically in terms of what is and is not known, and future directions are sketched. More generally, psychiatrists and psychologists in various specialties will be interested in the book's argument that a theory emphasizing personal control is of particular interest in the here and now, as individuality and control are such salient cultural topics.

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