

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:00 Today's episode of Hidden Forces is made possible by listeners like you. For more information about this week's episode or for easy access to related programming, visit our website at hiddenforces.io, and subscribe to our free email list. If you want access to overtime segments, episode transcripts and show rundowns full of links and detailed information related to each and every episode, check out our premium subscription, available through the Hidden Forces website or through our Patreon page. Remember, if you listen to this show on your Apple podcast app, you can give us a review. Each review helps more people find the show and join our amazing community. With that, please enjoy this week's episode.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:06 What's up, everybody? I have a really great episode in store for all of you today. Johann Hari is a beautiful writer, and he has written a beautiful book about this silent epidemic of depression and anxiety that is pervading our society and burdening the lives of so many people. Lost Connections begins as a chronicling of Johann's search for answers to the causes of his own depression, but evolves into an investigation, a quest, really, to understand the reasons for its increasing prevalence in the lives of others.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:47 In the introduction to the book, Johann tells us that some one in five US adults is taking at least one drug for a psychiatric problem and that nearly one in four middle-aged women in the United States is taking anti-depressants at any given time. Addictions to legal and illegal drugs are now so widespread that the life expectancy of white men is declining for the first time in the entire peacetime history of the United States.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:16 These statistics are not exclusive to Americans. When scientists test the water supply of Western countries, they always find it laced with antidepressants because so many people are taking and excreting them that they simply can't be filtered out of the water we drink every day. We are literally, as Johann writes, awash in these drugs, and we have come to accept that a huge number of the people all around us are so distressed that they feel the need to take a powerful chemical every day just to keep themselves together.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:53 This is an extremely sensitive issue because so many people suffer under the burden of depression. But unlike other disabilities, this one is particularly difficult to talk about. No one wants to be seen as a downer or weak, even though more people are starting to understand that depression is not a sign of weakness. But what is it a sign of?

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:03:18 Certainly there are people in this world who are predisposed toward some form of mental illness, including forms of severe, sometimes debilitating depression. But I find it difficult to believe that the epidemic, the rising rates of depression and anxiety, can be explained in biological terms or treated in pharmacological ways. Johann would say that these are not malfunctions caused by a biological deficiency. He would say that they're the natural response to a deficiency in how we live. This point, in particular, resonates with me, deeply.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:03:59 The Indian philosopher Krishnamurti famously said, "It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society." On the surface, things have never been better. This is literally the best time to be alive in all of human history by almost any metric, and yet, if you look between the cracks, you find people struggling. Some of them are depressed. Others are just overwhelmed, grieving, or lonely.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:04:30 It isn't just people in poverty who are struggling. This is a society-wide phenomenon. We see it in our politics, but we also see it in our culture. What do we value in our societies today? Who are the heroes that we idolize? If an alien species were to visit Earth, what would be the appeal we would make to save our lives?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:04:53 It's not a coincidence, in my view, that there has been an outpouring of interest in questions of ethics, moral philosophy and epistemology. What are we to infer from the resurgent public curiosity around psychedelics if not that they may hold the key to revelation, revelation of some elemental truth about life that we seem to have forgotten in our haste to remake the world and ourselves along some artificially constructed, commercially sanitized avatar of a human life.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:26 Joseph Campbell, the great mythological scholar and mystic, once said, "I don't believe people are looking for the meaning of life as much as they are looking for the experience of being alive." I wonder if this epidemic is not a reflection of our struggle to fulfill the demands of a culture whose values are no longer compatible with the needs of a human life.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:51 As Johann writes in the final paragraphs of his book while addressing his younger self, "You aren't a machine with broken parts. You're an animal whose needs are not being met. You are not suffering from a chemical imbalance in your brain. You are suffering from a social and spiritual imbalance in how we live. This pain is not your enemy, however much it hurts, and, Jesus, I know how much it hurts. It's your ally leading you away from a

wasted life and pointing the way towards a more fulfilling one. You can try and muffle that signal, or you can let it guide you away from the things that are hurting and draining you and towards the things that will meet your true needs."

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:06:37 Those of you who are regular listeners to this show know that I've devoted more time and attention to the subject of life, its properties, its merits, and how we can come to know and understand it as we move into a new paradigm of human experience at the frontier of technological futurism. I'm not sure where any of this is going. I'm still figuring it out, but I feel like this is an important piece of that puzzle. There are limits to human adaptability. We should be careful not to accept explanations simply because they come wrapped in a story of scientific certainty or commercial authority. People aren't machines. Your life matters. Your pain matters. Listen to it. It may have something important to teach. With that, I bring you Johann Hari.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:07:34 Johann Hari, welcome to Hidden Forces.
- Johann Hari:** 00:07:36 I'm so happy to meet you. Hurray!
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:07:37 You might be the most fun guest I've ever had on the show. I was saying that-
- Johann Hari:** 00:07:42 I find that very implausible.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:07:44 No, it's actually not implausible at all. We might as well just make a note of this. So, we just turned on the mics, but the audience doesn't know you and I were talking. You asked me something along the lines of who is your favorite guest or something like that, but it was difficult to give you an answer to that, because I told you I rank my guests not based on likability, but based on intelligence.
- Johann Hari:** 00:08:05 Yeah. I find that really interesting.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:08:05 But then I said that I really liked Hannah Fry. She was in that sort of vein.
- Johann Hari:** 00:08:10 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Mathematician, yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:08:11 She was a lot of fun. We had a lot of fun on the show. But you were so much fun. I went out and got you there in the green room, and you were talking to one of the producers, and you were cracking the guy up and it was ... Yeah.

Johann Hari: 00:08:20 That's interesting because we're going to talk about depression. I've been thinking a lot here in New York about ... I'm a great believer that one of the most important things you can do with pain is alchemize it into humor. One of the people who's a complete, perfect example, for me, this is Joan Rivers. You know, the ...

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:37 Yeah, of course.

Johann Hari: 00:08:38 ... the great comedian who died about five years ago.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:40 The late Joan Rivers.

Johann Hari: 00:08:41 I once saw Joan Rivers say one of the most obscene jokes I've ever seen anyone say. It was so bold. Can I tell you? You probably can't use this.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:50 No, we can use it.

Johann Hari: 00:08:51 It's so obscene that you might not use it. Can't remember exact details. I might get some of them wrong, but it was very soon after Whitney Houston died. A lot of your listeners will remember, Whitney Houston drowned in her bathtub. Joan Rivers comes on stage, and she's crying. She's like, "You know, I'm sorry. I know you want me to do comedy. But I just feel so bad about Whitney. I feel so bad." Everyone's nodding. They're like, "Yeah." We're like, "Wow! Joan Rivers is having a real emotional response to this."

Johann Hari: 00:09:20 She's like, "You know, I met Whitney on the red carpet years ago, and I've seen her loads of times since. I keep thinking I could have saved Whitney's life. She could be here now if only I'd done things differently." We're all thinking, "Oh, she's going to say maybe she could have got her into rehab." Then she goes, "Whitney asked me to get in that bath with her, and my vagina is so dry that the water would have just gone and she actually started going --

Demetri Kofinas: 00:09:42 Oh, my God! So crass.

Johann Hari: 00:09:44 ... whoosh, whoosh, whoosh! For literally about a minute, she goes, "Whoosh!" She goes, "That bitch would have fucking been alive now!"

Demetri Kofinas: 00:09:51 Wow!

Johann Hari: 00:09:52 Half the audience is just stunned, and half the audience was pissing themselves laughing. I think Joan Rivers is someone who all through her life ... Her husband famously killed himself in 1987, and she did her first gig three weeks later. She walks on stage, and opening line was, "I knew I shouldn't have taken that paper bag off my head while he was fucking me."

Johann Hari: 00:10:12 So, a very deep belief that what you do when you're in pain is you laugh. I think that's really important. I think particularly at the moment when there's, I think, in this culture, a puritanical war on comedy, all the kudos in the social media world goes to the person who goes, "Well, I don't find that funny," to which the logical response ... Well, sometimes there are, of course, jokes that go beyond the line and are cruel or whatever or racist, which is a form of cruelty.

Johann Hari: 00:10:39 But I think most often the response to them going, "Well, I don't find that funny," is, "Well, then I feel really sad for you, because your life's going to be so much harder if you can't laugh at things," right?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:10:47 Mmm (affirmative).

Johann Hari: 00:10:47 Anyway, sorry. I was just thinking about this, yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:10:49 No. I've noticed that as well. That's been a big gripe of a number of comedians, either because they don't want to go on college campuses as a result of a lot of what's been going on on college campuses that we've talked about on this show or just generally. A lot of the more older school comedians, it's true.

Johann Hari: 00:11:05 I think that's totally right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:11:06 What do you think that's about?

Johann Hari: 00:11:08 These things happen periodically. There's lots of things in social justice movements that I very strongly agree with ... Probably, I agree with 95% of them. My friend Andrew Sullivan talks ... I don't agree with Andrew on a lot of these things but I do think ... He calls it "the Great Awakening". You do get these religious revival movements in various points in American history and throughout human history. I don't know I'd want to think about it more but I do think and I stress, 95% of what they're advocating I'm strongly in favor of. I agree that we need to band together and fight for much greater social justice in the society. All I would say is we can do without being humorless.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:11:44 I think it's attitudinal. It's not about the substance. It's not about the principles. It's maybe about the attitude.

Johann Hari: 00:11:49 Yeah, dispositional or what.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:11:50 Andrew Solomon, another beautiful writer.

Johann Hari: 00:11:52 Yeah, yeah. I was actually thinking about Andrew Sullivan who, they're often confused. Andrew Sullivan wrote about depression-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:11:55 Andrew Sullivan! I thought-

Johann Hari: 00:11:57 Although I know Andrew Solomon as well-

Johann Hari: 00:11:58 ... and I like him very much but no, Andrew Sullivan is a- Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:12:00 Sullivan, right, right. Well, Andrew Solomon is a beautiful writer, and he wrote the only book of his that I've read is Far From the Tree.

Johann Hari: 00:12:08 Oh, great. I've read a few chapters about that, about how children who were radically different from their parents and-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:12:13 Radically different from their parents.

Johann Hari: 00:12:14 ... what we can learn from them. Yeah. I read the chapter about the Rwandan children who were produced, children were products of rape during the Rwandan genocide because I've done some reporting in Rwanda myself. Yeah. That's an extraordinary chapter.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:12:24 Yeah. He's a beautiful man, and you're a beautiful writer.

Johann Hari: 00:12:27 Oh, thanks very much, Demetri.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:12:28 It's a beautiful book.

Johann Hari: 00:12:28 Thank you very much.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:12:30 And it's very vulnerable and, I mean, the one that sticks in my head at this moment is the way you talked about pain leaking out of you. I mean, the language you used was poignant and descriptive. I think kudos to you for having the courage to write it and to write from a place of vulnerability in the way that you did. As I understand it, this is the only book of yours that I've read but it followed Chasing the Scream, which was about

addiction, which I think you've said also is something that you've dealt with.

- Johann Hari:** 00:13:01 In my family, not myself, yes.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:13:02 In your family, not personally.
- Johann Hari:** 00:13:04 I think there's an interesting to think about public vulnerability, which is very, very hard to do. There's something about making yourself vulnerable in front of strangers that is terrifying and very powerful and one of the things that's surprising and easy to forget if you spend too much time in the kind of aggressive kind of gladiatorial world, the best parts of social media, then actually most people's response to sincere open-hearted vulnerability is to lean into it and be kind. Yeah, as you said, I mean, I opened the book by ...
- Johann Hari:** 00:13:38 There were really two big mysteries that made me write this book and I was quite afraid to look into them. I actually intended to write this as my first book before Chasing the Scream and I was too frightened to look into these subjects. I started and I kept pulling back.
- Johann Hari:** 00:13:51 So, the first mystery is that I'm 40 years old and every year that I've been alive, depression and anxiety have increased in the United States and across the Western world.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:14:00 You have a baby face.
- Johann Hari:** 00:14:01 Yeah. I do just naturally look like a ... My mother always jokes that no matter what happens, I'll always look like a Down syndrome child.
- Johann Hari:** 00:14:08 Yes. Partly, it's that question. What's going on?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:14:11 The rising rates of depression and anxiety you said?
- Johann Hari:** 00:14:13 Yeah, and why is this happening? And this is just one of many indicators of despair that are going on. We're meeting, here in New York, just a week after the Center for Disease Control announced, we now have the highest level of suicide in the recorded history of this country.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:14:27 On a percentage basis?

Johann Hari: 00:14:28 Yeah. I don't know if it's percentage or absolute number. I'd want to double check but bear in mind, that figure does not include opioid deaths which-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:36 A passive suicide in a way. In some sense.

Johann Hari: 00:14:38 Yeah. Well, or about to. I mean, bear in mind, more American citizens have now died in the opioid crisis than have died in the Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars combined, and the rate is still going up and up.

Johann Hari: 00:14:51 So, we've got all these indicators of acute pain and despair. I wanted to understand why. What's going on? Why are so many more and more of us with each year that passes, finding it harder to get through the day?

Johann Hari: 00:15:06 The second mystery, which you alluded to, Demetri, was a more personal one, which is when I was a teenager, I'd gone to my doctor and, as you say, I remember saying that I had a feeling like pain was leaking out of me. I couldn't control it. I couldn't regulate it. I didn't understand why it was happening.

Johann Hari: 00:15:24 My doctor told me a story that I now realize was not totally untrue but was really oversimplified. My doctor said, "We know why people feel this way. It's just because there's a problem in your brain. Some people naturally have a chemical imbalance in their heads or they're naturally lacking a chemical called serotonin. Clearly, you are one of these people. All we need to do is give you some drugs. You're going to be fine." And I started taking an antidepressant called Paxil. I felt immediate relief at being given this story and I felt real relief after taking the drug.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:15:56 Just to set the stage here in terms of timeline, what year was this? When was this?

Johann Hari: 00:16:01 So, I was 18, so it would have been 1998, I think. Roughly. No, maybe a little bit earlier than that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:07 Mid 90s.

Johann Hari: 00:16:08 Yeah. The mid to late 90s. Yeah, and this is a story, at that time, that loads of people were being told. One of the bestselling books in the United States at that time is Listening to Prozac by Peter Kramer, who I interviewed for this book who I think is ... Yeah, we can talk about him if you want.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:23 Absolutely. That's a big part of the book, actually.

Johann Hari: 00:16:24 I remember when I'm given this drug, getting a tremendous amount of relief. Then, a few months later, feeling this pain come back, going back to my doctor. My doctor said, "Clearly, I didn't give you a high enough dose." Gave me a higher dose. Again, I felt better. Again, a bit faster this time. This feeling of pain came back. I was really in this cycle of jacking up the dose again and again, until, for 13 years, I took the maximum possible dose that you are legally allowed to take. Sometimes, I actually even exceeded that by getting it from other people. At the end of which, I still felt like shit. So, I still felt acutely depressed.

Johann Hari: 00:16:59 So, I wanted to understand, well, what's going on here, then, because I'm doing everything I'm being told to do by the story my doctor and the wider culture is telling me to do. Yet, it hasn't solved this problem. It gave me a little bit of relief, but it didn't solve the problem. I seem to be surrounded by many people in the same position.

Johann Hari: 00:17:16 So, for my book *Lost Connections*, I ended up going on this big, long journey. I wanted to use my training in the social sciences at Cambridge University to interview the leading experts in the world about what causes depression and anxiety and what solves them, and to just sit with a really big mixture of people with different perspectives, from an Amish village in Indiana, because the Amish have really low levels of depression, to a city in Brazil where they've banned advertising to see if that would make people feel better, to a lab in Baltimore where they were giving people psychedelics to see if that would help.

Johann Hari: 00:17:47 I learned lots of things, but the core of what I learned is there's scientific evidence for nine causes of depression and anxiety. Two of them are indeed in our biology. Your genes can make you more sensitive to this problem although they don't write your destiny. We can talk about how. There are real changes that happen in your brain when you become depressed that can make it harder to get out but most of the factors that cause depression and anxiety are not in our biology. Most of them are factors in the way we live.

Johann Hari: 00:18:15 When you understand that, firstly, you can see why it's rising because, of course, human biology didn't radically change every year for the last 40 years but more importantly, that opens up a different set of solutions that we can offer people alongside the option of chemical antidepressants. No one wants to take that off the menu.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:31 I didn't even bother. I have a gazillion quotes for our subscribers who are subscribed to the rundown. I have so many quotes from the book because there are so many beautiful quotes that I just didn't feel like they were something that I could take from it without just doing you an injustice.

Johann Hari: 00:18:45 Oh, thank you.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:46 But one of the things that popped in my head as you were talking is, in the book you wrote, "It's not serotonin, it's society," and another one about, "It's not you who are broken," because we're told that depression is a result of a broken brain or an imbalanced brain but that it's really society that's sick, in a sense.

Johann Hari: 00:19:07 Yes. Society's a very significant factor. I want to stress it's not the whole thing. So, there's very strong scientific agreement, at least in theory, this doesn't translate into scientific practice but there's a very broad scientific agreement that there are three kinds of cause of depression and anxiety. So, there are biological causes which are real and it's important to stress that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:28 Sure, and I'm not saying they aren't. I just wanted to make the point that and we'll continue here. One of the big insights I had when reading your book was to take a moment, step back and look at society, look at how sick society truly is. This is not something that's new to me. I've been aware of it. We did a recent episode. I was commenting to you about it with Shoshana Zuboff about the pernicious impact of these behavioral algorithms under the surface, undermining our volition and our desires and our wants and our needs.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:00 The amount of time that people are spending, as Sherry Turkle says, "Alone together." I'm not unaware of these things, but I think I just didn't appreciate the impact that they have had on even me. There's a quote I'm familiar with but you mention in the book. It's a Krishnamurti quote, which is, he says, "It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society." I think that is one of the central messages of your book but please continue. I just wanted to make that point.

Johann Hari: 00:20:31 Well, I think that's really important what you said. One of the biggest shifts that I made in my thinking about depression in the many years I was researching this was I had essentially believed that my depression was like a glitch in my coding. It was an error. It was a meaningless error. That's what my doctor told me, not in those terms but that's implicit in the story my doctor told me.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:55 Some people have normal serotonin. You have less. We just need to get your serotonin up.

Johann Hari: 00:20:58 Exactly. It's a mechanical problem.

Johann Hari: 00:21:01 What I actually learned is while there are some mechanical components to be sure, this is a much more meaningful signal than that. Your pain makes sense. We feel these ways for reasons. Those reasons are perfectly understandable. There is a huge body of social and biological science behind them. And what we need to do is listen to the signal that we are being given, because what we've been doing up to now is either ignoring the signal, insulting the signal by calling it just a sign of personal weakness, or pathologizing the signal by saying it's purely a biological problem when, in fact, there's many things that you know a lot of the causes that are out now, depression and anxiety but one that unites most of them, not all is a very simple one that goes back to the 50s, for which there's a huge amount of evidence.

Johann Hari: 00:21:53 Everyone listening to your program knows that they have natural physical needs. Obviously, you need food. You need water. You need shelter. You need clean air. If I took those things away from you, you'd be in real trouble real fast but there's equally strong evidence that all human beings have natural psychological needs. You need to feel you belong. You need to feel your life has meaning and purpose. You need to feel that people see you and value you. You need to feel you have a future that makes sense. This culture we built is good at lots of things. I'm glad to be alive today. I had to go to the dentist recently. I'm glad to be alive in 2019, but we have been getting less and less good at meeting these deep, underlying psychological needs. It's not the only thing that's going on, but I don't think we can understand our depression and anxiety crisis, our addiction crisis, or our political crisis without understanding that we have built a culture that is not meeting our deepest psychological needs.

Johann Hari: 00:22:48 That can sound a bit fancy in the abstract so let me give a very specific example. This is the loneliest society in human history. There's a study that asks Americans how many close friends do you have, who you can turn to in a crisis? When they started doing it years ago, the most common answer was five. Today, the most common answer is none. Half of all Americans asked how many people know you well, say, "Nobody." What is life like if you are so profoundly alone?

- Johann Hari:** 00:23:17 I spent a lot of time interviewing Professor John Cacioppo, who's at Chicago. He was a leading expert in the world on loneliness who sadly and tragically just died. I remember him saying to me, "Why are we alive? Why do we exist?" One key reason is that our ancestors on the savannas of Africa were really good at one thing. They often weren't bigger than the animals they took down. They often weren't faster than the animals they took down but they were much better at banding together into groups and cooperating. Just like bees evolved to live in a hive, humans evolved to live in a tribe. We are the first humans ever to disband our tribes and tell ourselves stories that we don't need them, that we're all John Wayne on the frontier. By the way, even the cowboys of the frontier weren't that ... The whole myth is absurd.
- Johann Hari:** 00:24:03 So, we created this deeply lonely society and Professor Cacioppo showed a few things. Firstly, loneliness causes depression and anxiety. I can talk to you about how he proved that but he proved it conclusively. Secondly, there's overwhelming social science evidence, loneliness has massively increased. So, this helps us to understand one aspect of our rising epidemic but it was very important for me to think, "Okay. What do we do with that that can actually feel weirdly when you first learn it, quite disempowering," and like, "Oh, shit! We're up against this enormous social change," but actually one of the heroes of my book, an incredible man called Dr. Sam Everington pioneered a kind of solution to that, is now spreading all over the world and I think helps us to again see that when you understand the problem in a more sophisticated way, you can find solutions that match that problem.
- Johann Hari:** 00:24:51 So, Sam was really uncomfortable. He's a doctor in a poor part of East London, where I lived for a long time, and very sadly, he was never my doctor. He was not comfortable because he had loads of patients coming to him with terrible depression and anxiety. Like me, Sam thinks there is some value in chemical antidepressants but he can see a couple of things. Firstly, his patients were depressed and anxious but perfectly understandable, perfectly good reasons on the Krishnamurti principle, right?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:25:17 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Johann Hari:** 00:25:17 Like they were really lonely. Secondly, he could see that while chemical antidepressants gave them some relief, they didn't solve the problem for most of them. So, he decided one day to pioneer a different approach. One day, a woman came to see him who I got to know well later called Lisa Cunningham who'd

been shut away in her home with crippling depression and anxiety, barely leaving for seven years. Sam said to Lisa, "Don't worry. I'm going to carry on giving you these drugs. I'm also going to prescribe something else." There was an area behind the doctor's surgery that was known as Dog Shit Alley, this suite of doctors' offices. Dog Shit Alley gives you a sense of what it was like. It was just scrubland basically where dogs would, in fact, go and shit.

Johann Hari: 00:25:58 Sam said to Lisa, "What I'd like you to do is come and turn out a couple of times a week. I'm going to come, too, because I've been quite anxious. We're going to meet with a group of other depressed and anxious people and together, we'll find something to do so we won't be lonely and we won't feel life is meaningless."

Johann Hari: 00:26:14 The first time the group met, Lisa was literally physically sick with anxiety, but the group starts talking and they're like, "Well, what can we do?" These are inner city people. They don't know anything about gardening. They decided they were going to learn gardening. They start watching YouTube clips. They start reading books. They start to get their fingers in the soil. They start to learn the rhythms of the seasons. There's a lot of evidence that exposure to the natural world is a really powerful antidepressant. Even more importantly, they start to form a tribe. They start to form a group. They start to care about each other. If one of them doesn't show up, they'll go looking for them. "Are you okay? Do you need any help?" They did what we do as human beings when we're in tribes. They started to solve each other's problems. The way Lisa put it to me, as the garden began to bloom, we began to bloom.

Johann Hari: 00:26:59 There was a small study in Norway of a similar program which is part of a growing body of evidence that found it was more than twice as effective as chemical antidepressants. I think for obvious reason, this is something I saw all over the world, from San Francisco to São Paulo to Sydney. The most effective strategies for dealing with depression and anxiety are the ones that deal with the deep underlying reasons why we feel so bad in the first place.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:27:22 So, a few things I want to mention first. This is a very challenging field to look at data objectively or with confidence. There's already a lot of evidence that studies in the physical sciences and the natural sciences are tainted with all sorts of bias by the investigators in the social sciences. It's even more difficult because you're dealing with human subjects but you lay out a lot of data and surveys and studies in the book. It's up to

the reader ultimately to determine whether or not he or she is convinced by that information. I think, ultimately, though, for these types of discussions, you can't rely just on the data. I think there's a certain amount of whether this rings true for you in your own life. Better if you want to ...

- Johann Hari:** 00:28:07 I would say a few things about that. Firstly, it's worth stressing, this isn't some fringe position.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:28:13 No.
- Johann Hari:** 00:28:13 My argument is the position of the main, largest, most prestigious medical body in the world, the World Health Organization and the leading doctor on mental health at the United Nations, who said for World Health Day, two years ago in 2017, "We need to talk less about chemical imbalances and more about power imbalances and the imbalances in the way we live."
- Johann Hari:** 00:28:32 So, this is ... What's called the biopsychosocial model, that there are biological, psychological, and social causes of depression, anxiety is rarely disputed. It's very, very broad consensus but as Professor Lawrence Kirmayer at McGill in Montreal said to me when I went there to interview him, "In theory, we have a biopsychosocial model. In practice, we have a bio-bio-bio model," right?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:28:55 Right.
- Johann Hari:** 00:28:55 So, and that's partly not the fault of doctors. We can talk about why.
- Johann Hari:** 00:28:59 So, I think you're right that we need to weigh the evidence very carefully. We can weigh the evidence about what causes depression and anxiety very carefully. We need to weigh the evidence about the solutions very carefully. This is what the World Health Organization, of course, is designed to do, but I think that there's also a deeper thing I what you're getting at, which is ... How do I put this? I did an interview just not long after the book came out where I said, "First thing, very similar to what I just said to you now about loneliness causes depression." The interview said to me, "Well, this is a very controversial theory." I remember sitting there thinking, "How did we get to this point where the most banal insight you can imagine, one that if you'd ask your grandmother in Greece or my grandmothers in Switzerland and Scotland, "Hey, Grandma. Do you think if people are really lonely, they're more or less

likely to become depressed?" My grandmother would say, "Why ask me such a stupid question? Get out my kitchen."

- Johann Hari:** 00:29:55 How did we get to the point where the most banal human insight is something that is so obviously rooted in our natures as a social species got to be regarded as controversial? I think it's partly because this biological story, which I want to stress has some truth in it, has displaced these much more common sense insights and the more common sense solutions that flow from it. That's happened for many reasons.
- Johann Hari:** 00:30:21 So, the obvious reason and I don't want to overstate this. It's real but I think some people take this too far. The obviously argument is it's big pharma. There's real truth in that. Think about Lisa Cunningham, the woman at the gardening program. There is a \$10 billion industry to tell Lisa that her depression is a result of the problem in her brain and there's a \$0 billion industry to get her to go gardening with these people. I mean, maybe not \$0 billion because maybe Home Depot make a little bit of money out of the plants they sell, but there's no organized lobby for that. So, that's part of it.
- Johann Hari:** 00:30:53 I don't think that's the main reason or rather, I think we were receptive to that biologization, that overbiologization because of deeper factors in the society. So, I don't think there's a coincidence. Again, I want to stress I don't think there's any conscious agency in this. I don't think it's a coincidence that the biological model rises at the same time as this extreme individualism and hypercapitalism.
- Johann Hari:** 00:31:18 So, when I was a child, I think when I was maybe one or two, Margaret Thatcher famously said, "There's no such thing as society. There's only individuals and their families." This is a very core neoliberal concept and, as you can probably guess, I've never liked Margaret Thatcher. And I had studied the social sciences. Yet, for most of the time I was depressed, it didn't even occur to me that there was social causes of my depression. It's a sign of how deeply we absorb these neoliberal insights, these Thatcherite, Reaganite insights, that the social explanations seem counterintuitive because if you believe there's no such thing as society, if you think the only locus of action or agency is the atomized individual, then explaining that actually these things are not the result of the actions of atomized individuals. They are, in fact, the result of deep social changes, the rises are. That sound, it's like I'm speaking in Shakespeare's grammar. Do you see what I mean?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:32:11 Yeah, yeah. What's interesting is what comes to mind as you speak is that I imagine that in earlier generations, the opposite problem would have occurred where people felt stifled to sort of be themselves, that repression of the individual would have been a bigger issue, where society's roles were thrust upon you and you find yourself suffocating under the weight of societal expectations.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:32:36 Now, perhaps the opposite is the case where the individual has been raised to the central point of society, where society's fallen away or religious institutions are fallen away or tribes or our sense of belonging. There is clearly, I think, a crisis in a sense of belonging and we see that, I think, in the return of a nationalist politics in European and in other places and in the problems with the European Union from a political standpoint.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:02 There's something else I want to raise with you which you're bringing up this rise of neoliberalism and the individual and Reaganism and Margaret Thatcher. My mind didn't actually go there. My mind went to some other place. Something that hasn't really been discussed. It has to do with, there's no real word for it but the over-scientification of society, that we live in a time where everything increasingly needs to be quantified. Even when we talk about this here and others been a revolution in the social sciences, in cultural anthropology, in evolutionary biology, these fields that attempt to explain and say, "Hey, look. There's a reason why you feel bad when you're alone. It's because you evolved to feel bad when you're alone as a sign to keep you in the group. This is a normal evolutionary adaptation. Like you said, if you went back to my grandmother in Greece, she'd say, "I didn't need a degree with that. I didn't need a study," just like those studies that would come out. You said you used to eat fried chicken. I've seen studies come out say, "Fried chicken's bad for you." Well, no shit it's bad for you. I didn't need you to spend all the money to tell me but we do live in this society where-

Johann Hari: 00:34:18 If you carry on dissing fried chicken, I'm going to have to walk out of this interview.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:20 You don't eat it any more. Do you still eat fried chicken?

Johann Hari: 00:34:22 Every now and then, yeah. I relapsed, right. I'm sorry. You were saying.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:26 When I was a little kid, I used to have a thing for fried chicken, but I can't eat it now. I don't find it tasteful. Anyway, that's a whole different conversation. There are other things.

Johann Hari: 00:34:34 Yeah. We're never going to agree on that point. That's going to be a profound division between us but go on.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:40 But this and this, your point about common sense and wisdom. There's been a loss, and I think also that goes also with the loss of the human quality of the mystery. I've heard your interview, your conversation with Sam Harris. He's obviously a famous atheist. You said you're an atheist as well. My view on this subject is something I've struggled to understand what people mean when they say, "Atheist," because Christopher Hitchens was, of course, the famous atheist.

Johann Hari: 00:35:07 Yeah. He was a friend of mine as well, yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:08 Yeah, he was. He was a wonderful man. A wonderful man and he wrote *God Is Not Great*, of course, but when he was dying and he wrote so courageously when he was dying on mortality. The way he described what he thought the world was or what he thought the world could be or what reality was to me was very much along the lines of what I felt.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:28 To me, I think we're so wedded to theism as being something related to Old Testament gods or some sort of god figure that we've defined in Western society, that maybe we don't have a good way to talk about the mystery. In Western culture, you've seen this rise of spirituality. I'm spiritual or people going and trying to meditate and finding ... You know, people are looking for something to give them a sense of meaning and depth and grounding in this chaotic world where we know, even scientifically, we know that this is not what we think it is. Even the idea that this table is a solid object is not just a hallucination of your mind, but in fact we know just simply on an atomic level, it is almost entirely empty space. Yet, we perceive it as a solid object.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:21 So, we understand that the world is a highly illusory construction and there's a mystery there and we struggle with it. So, I think, as we tear down institutions and we tear down pillars of society, we're left with nothing and-

Johann Hari: 00:36:36 I think it's worse than that we're left with nothing. So, one of the causes of depression and anxiety that I write about in the book are, remind me to come back to the point about over-scientification because I think it's really interesting that you'd find about that but one of the causes of depression and anxiety that I write about in the book that I found most challenging comes from an incredible man you should totally have on your show called Professor Tim Kasser. He's at Knox College in

Illinois. So, everyone knows that junk food has taken over our diets and made us physically sick. As you've mentioned, I'm a lover of KFC. But and we all know why. You need nutrition. Junk food appeals to the part of you that needs nutrition but, in fact, poisons you.

- Johann Hari:** 00:37:12 Something very similar has happened with our minds. A kind of junk values have taken over our minds and made us mentally sick. If all that happened is we had emptied ourselves of values, that would be bad but what we've actually done is something worse.
- Johann Hari:** 00:37:24 So, for thousands of years, philosophers have said, "If you think life is about money and status and showing off, you're going to feel like shit." That's not an exact quote from Confucius but that is the gist of what he said. But nobody had scientifically investigated this until Professor Kasser started to about 25 years ago. He made a series of really interesting discoveries.
- Johann Hari:** 00:37:42 So, everyone listening to Hidden Forces is a mixture of two kinds of motive. Imagine you play the piano in the morning. If you play the piano in the morning because you love it and it gives you joy, that's what is called an intrinsic motivation to play the piano. You're not doing it to get anything out of it further down the line. It's just that experience is something that's meaningful to you, a moment in which you experience flow. That's profound to you.
- Johann Hari:** 00:38:06 Okay. Now imagine you play the piano not because you love it but because your parents are massively pressuring you because it's their dream that you'll be a piano maestro or in a dive bar to make the rent or to post the clips on Instagram because you want to get likes. That would be what's called an extrinsic motive to play the piano. You're not doing it because that's the experience that's meaningful to you. You're doing it to get something out of it further down the line.
- Johann Hari:** 00:38:32 Now, of course, we're both a mixture of both kind of intrinsic and extrinsic motives. You have to be to get through life but Professor Kasser showed a few things. Firstly, as a society, we have become much more driven by these extrinsic values by money, status, how you look to other people. You also showed crucially, the more you are driven by these extrinsic values, the more likely you are to become depressed and anxious by quite a significant amount. This is why I've begun to think these extrinsic value are a bit like junk food.

Johann Hari: 00:39:03 There are many reasons why these extrinsic values make us feel so bad. In some ways, again, I think it goes back to you think about our grandmothers. In some ways, it seems almost banal. Everyone listening to your show knows they're not going to lie on their deathbed and think about all the likes they got on Instagram and all the shoes they bought. They're going to think about moments of love and meaning and connection, but as Professor Kasser put it to me, we live in a machine that is designed to get us to neglect what is meaningful about life.

Johann Hari: 00:39:31 So, the average 18-month American child, more of them know what the McDonald's "M" means than know their own last name. So, I don't think this is the absence of values. This is a value system that tells you if you don't feel good, there is a solution. Go shopping. Buy things. Consume. Display those things you've consumed on social media to create envy in other people so they will go and buy and consume. Then, the positive effect [inaudible 00:40:00] buying that thing has to wear off quite quickly, because then you have to be made inadequate enough to go shopping again.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:40:04 No. I agree with that, no question about it. The destruction of one set of values implicitly creates a vacuum in which something fills it. In this case, it's junk. I'll also say, you're also correct about that, and I want to emphasize that point as well. We live in a society that is an answers-based culture. When you have depression, this is a problem and it's a problem that needs a solution. The way you describe your own experience in your book when you had the epiphany on the beach. Where was it? You were-

Johann Hari: 00:40:34 In San Diego, yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:40:34 ... in a vacation and you realized,-

Johann Hari: 00:40:36 Oh, sorry. That was in Barcelona. Sorry. I had a different epiphany on another beach.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:40:39 ... right, in Barcelona. And you realized that you're depressed immediately and because you had a story about what it meant to be depressed and it had to do with serotonin and chemical imbalance, which interestingly enough, you pointed out in the book, there is no scientifically accepted notion of a chemically-balanced brain, so the idea of your-

Johann Hari: 00:40:58 Yeah. That's not a scientific concept. Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:40:59 No. It's not even a concept.

Johann Hari: 00:41:00 That's the story that was promoted by drug company PRs, which is not to say there's no value in drugs. There's some but I think you're right.

Johann Hari: 00:41:06 But just to go back to the thing you said before, Demetri, that I think is really important and worth thinking through and saying I was taught a lot by a really extraordinary person about this. So, if we think about what he was saying about over-scientization of these problems, as you said that, I was thinking a lot about an incredible woman called Dr. Joanne Cacciatore. So, Joanne-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:26 What do you mean oversanitization of these problems?

Johann Hari: 00:41:29 Well, I'll tell you about her and what the insight that I got from her that relates to this that I think helps explain it.

Johann Hari: 00:41:35 Joanne's daughter Cheyenne died during childbirth and Joanne became one of the leading experts on traumatic grief in the United States. She's a professor and she works with people who've gone through the most extreme kinds of bereavement, people whose children have been murdered, that kind of thing. Joanne was really disturbed when she began working with victims of extreme trauma having gone through a terrible trauma herself. To discover how many of them were being told they were mentally ill and drugged.

Johann Hari: 00:42:04 So, for example, she worked with one woman whose daughter have been raped and burned alive in a public park. This woman had told her psychiatrist that as she went to sleep, she heard her daughter's voice talking to her and it calmed her. The doctor diagnosed her as psychotic and started giving her antipsychotic medication. Joanne was really disconcerted by this. She started to investigate the science [inaudible 00:42:30] of grief. She came across this really important story that tells this big part of what we're getting wrong.

Johann Hari: 00:42:36 So, in the 1970s, the American Psychiatric Association, the APA, decided to standardize how they diagnosed depression in the United States because up till then, doctors were just using their own makeshift definitions. It's quite a good thing to standardize the diagnosis. So, they drew up a list of 10 symptoms. Pretty obvious things, crying all the time, feeling life isn't worth living, that kind of thing. They send it out to doctors and they say, "If your patients show more than five of these 10 symptoms for

more than two weeks, diagnose them as mentally ill and give whatever help you can."

- Johann Hari:** 00:43:06 So, they send them out and psychiatrists start using these criteria but quite soon afterwards, these psychiatrists come back and go, "Look, we've got a bit of a problem here. If we use these criteria the way you've told us to, we're going to have to diagnose every grieving person as mentally ill because these are, in fact, the symptoms of grief as well. The APA were like, "Shit! That's not what we meant."
- Johann Hari:** 00:43:27 They created a little while later, something that became known as the grief loophole. It said, "Okay. If your patients show more than 5 of these 10 symptoms for more than two weeks, diagnose as mentally ill unless someone they love has died in the last year, in which case it doesn't count. It's a perfectly normal response. They're not mentally ill. Don't diagnose them. Don't drug them."
- Johann Hari:** 00:43:48 So, doctors started using that but that, of course, started to beg the question, "Well, hang on a minute. You're saying depression is just a biological problem except there's one circumstance in life where it's a perfectly logical response. Well, why is someone you love dying the only circumstance where you're allowed to feel in terrible pain and distress for protracted period of time? Why not if you lose your job? Why not if you lose your home? Why not if you're stuck in a job you hate for the next 40 years?" Everyone listening can think of 100 scenarios that would be perfectly reasonable but that was a set of questions, as Joanne put it to me, our entire mental health system is not designed for questions like that.
- Johann Hari:** 00:44:24 That requires us to look at context. We have a model that's imported from infectious disease. Infectious disease and it's been one of the great miracles of the modern age and one of the greatest advances in human history is you can identify a pathogen and you can get it out of the human body. Think about the smallpox virus. Smallpox killed an untold number of human beings, one of the great curses on our species. No one since 1972 has died of smallpox because we use this model from infectious disease, which is incredibly effective, but transferred to mental health, it's not a very good model.
- Johann Hari:** 00:44:58 Now, I'm not saying it does nothing good. It does have some drugs that do give real help to people. Joanne put it to me really well. She said, "You know, grief is not a mental illness. We don't grieve as a malfunction. We grieve because we've loved someone. If you tell me that your neighbor died, I'll feel sad for

you and for the neighbor but I'm not going to grieve because I don't know your neighbor. If my neighbor dies and I know my neighbor, I'm going to feel really sad. That's a tribute. Grief is a form of love."

- Johann Hari:** 00:45:30 Joanne says, "You know, why do we talk about?" It's so striking to me. I did a book event in Tucson about a month ago, book festival there and I had an experience which I have all the time but this particular young woman sticks in my mind. Young woman comes up to me. She's 16 and she actually asked a question and I said to her to come and [inaudible 00:45:47] because I could see how distressed she was.
- Johann Hari:** 00:45:50 She said, "I want to talk to you because I've got ... " Then, she gave me a shopping list of diagnoses she'd been given. "I've got ADHD, PTSD, major depression." I talked to her about her life. In fact, what happened is, she'd been horribly abused, sexually abused, and she had perfectly understandable normal response to having been dreadfully sexually abused. What happened is, her abuser tells her she's disgusting, she deserves it, she's corrupt.
- Johann Hari:** 00:46:20 Then, what happens is these people, no doubt well meaning, the mental health industry arrives and says, "In fact, you are biologically broken." What this young woman I believe and I think the best evidence from all the people I interviewed including experts on sexual abuse and I'm sure we can talk about some of that, what this young woman needed to be told is, "Your pain makes sense." Actually, it's incredible that you've survived this and are as strong and competent as you are. What she needed to be told were healing, positive stories. Instead, she'd been given a pathologizing checklist that made her believe she was biologically broken as well as what the abuser told her, which is that she was morally broken.
- Johann Hari:** 00:46:57 Joanne Cacciatore, the wonderful person who's the expert on the grief exception, she talks a lot about why are we using these bizarre scientific science-sounding labels when in fact, it's just you've been horribly abused. You feel bad for perfectly obvious reasons. We're going to love and support you and give you massive amounts of support to get through that. Why do we have these absurd-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:47:21 Why do you think that is that we have those? My answer would tend to say that there is something around the discomfort that our society has the intolerance, rather, with uncertainty. There seems to be a need to have answers in our society today that is perhaps greater than any prior point.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:43 Another thing that we seem to have along your point you made earlier is we have this idea of what's normal and if you're not normal by those standards, well, something needs to be done, an intervention must happen in order to bring you back to normal.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:58 This isn't just true psychologically. It's also true in the economy. We don't tolerate recessions. Recessions are an inevitable consequence of any market economy. They are a liquidation of malinvestment. We don't tolerate those any more.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:48:12 The same thing goes for physical sickness. Drugs like Tamiflu or other antibiotics are easily prescribed in order to help people get through an illness or they can work through being sick but, in fact, getting sick is something that you need to, like you said, like your experience that you had in Vietnam eating the poisonous apple. The pain was a symptom, was a sign of something else. The pain was going to help tell the nurses what was wrong with you. We don't, I think, have patience for not being at the very top, not performing at our peak. Everyone's got to be hitting every mark and crushing it all the time. The reality is we aren't machines. We're people. We're made of flesh and blood. We have hearts. We love. We feel pain. We suffer. We feel loss.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:06 And the idea that these things need to be treated as malignancies or as pathologies shows, I think, a lack of humanity today that is part of this affliction.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:17 I want to make one more just brief point because it came up to me on my own because this is a movie that I bring up all the time on this show. It's The Matrix and it literally is for me like religion. There is a scene in the first Matrix where Morpheus is being interrogated by Agent Smith and Agent Smith tells Morpheus that there was a previous matrix to this matrix and it was a catastrophe. Untold numbers of crops were lost. People rejected the program.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:48 I think there is a similar thing happening in our society. People are rejecting the program on a very basic level. They're being told this is what life is. This is what a meaningful life is. This is what a fulfilling life is. These are the values that you need to live your life by, and it's not fulfilling and people are unable to live.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:50:09 One more thing. Really quick, I'll throw out there, because I am a great fan and an amateur student of mythology, starting with Greek mythology, obviously. All my professors of mythology

were not at MYU. They were actually through The Teaching Company and this wonderful woman-

- Johann Hari:** 00:50:25 I love The Teaching Company. It's amazing.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:50:25 Do you know Elizabeth Vandiver?
- Johann Hari:** 00:50:27 No.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:50:27 She's a wonderful woman, and she taught a class, among many, on Greek mythology.
- Johann Hari:** 00:50:33 Is it on The Teaching Company?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:50:34 Yeah. It is. She's a very old lecturer. She's phenomenal. Yes.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:50:36 So, but I also read Joseph Campbell and he had this one quote, I think it was from a Bill Moyer interview where he said, "I don't believe people are looking for the meaning of life as much as they're looking for the experience of being alive." I think there is a loss of a sense of being alive and just to cap it off. In your book, I think you struck a chord with that because you talked about meeting an old friend of yours that you gave her the name Annie, I believe. She slipped up in a conversation that she had with you and she was talking about the past. She meant to say, "When I was young," and instead she said, "When I was alive." I think there is this profound sense of ... You see it in zombie films. I think that's part of it. There is a feeling of deadness that is pervading society and it's part of this story.
- Johann Hari:** 00:51:28 There's loads of things in what you just said that I think are really worth thinking about. So, Joanne says exactly rightly, "Why do we have this crazy ..." So, when they invented the grief loophole that said that you're allowed for a year to not be called mentally ill if you so distressed, they gradually shrank and shrank the grief loophole. So, it went down from a year to six months to two months. Then, it went down to two weeks and then they got rid of it.
- Johann Hari:** 00:51:51 So, now, you can be diagnosed almost immediately. In fact, as Dr. Cacciatore showed, 9% of grieving parents of babies are diagnosed and drugged in the first 48 hours after their child dies. She argues, I think very persuasively, that that actually interrupts the grieving process and is ... Because grief is not a mental illness.

Johann Hari: 00:52:12 But I think you're right. She says, "Why does that happen?" A big part of it is the demands of kind of a hyperneoliberal capitalism. It's like, "You've had your two weeks to grieve your dead baby. Get back to work, right? Go back to the office."

Johann Hari: 00:52:24 Speaking recently to Dr. Daniel Sullivan at Tucson, who's an amazing thinker on this. He's a big part of what's called existential psychology. He pointed out about it, I've never thought about this as clearly before but I'm reading about a bit since. If you look at the origins of American academic psychology, it's, in Fordism, Henry Ford and other mass manufacturers fund the invention of academic psychology with the specific goal, "We want to know how to get the most out of our factory workers." That is still very much the tradition that dominates academic psychology in the United States. It's interesting.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:52:58 Well, B. F. Skinner's work has been applied in spades in Silicon Valley's behavioral algorithms. I mean, that is ... Yeah, that is quintessential.

Johann Hari: 00:53:06 Yeah. It's incredible, essentially because one of the things, I'm doing a long-term project where I'm writing with his cooperation, a biography of Noam Chomsky. It is really fascinating when you look at-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:53:15 Oh, wow!

Johann Hari: 00:53:16 ... this real return of Skinnerism, the return of this philosophy that has a ludicrous idea about what human beings are, that we're just responses to these very crude signals.

Johann Hari: 00:53:27 So, I think you can see that there's definitely this element of we have a model of psychology that is driven towards make the person do their work. In fact, one of the criteria often in these mental health diagnoses is can they work, but I think we have to think differently about work itself.

Johann Hari: 00:53:44 So, I note and this is, of all the causes of depression and anxiety that I write about in the book, this is the one that I think if we dealt with it and there are ways we can deal with it that are very practical, I think it would lead to the biggest single fall in depression and anxiety. Now, that's a hunch. I don't want to overstate my hunch but I think there's very good evidence to the underlying premises.

Johann Hari: 00:54:02 So, I noticed that lots of people I know who are depressed and anxious, their depression and anxiety focuses around their work. So, I was like, "Maybe but I know what unusual. Let's see." Gallop did the most detailed study of this. Huge study. I think it was three years to figure out how do people feel about their work. What they found is 13% of us, one three percent, like their jobs most of the time. 63% are what they called sleep working. You don't like it. You don't hate it. You just kind of tolerate it. 24% of people hate and fear their jobs.

Johann Hari: 00:54:34 I was quite struck by that. That means that 87% of people don't like the thing they're doing most of the time. This thing that we don't like doing is spreading over more and more of the day. The average person answers their first work email at 7:43 a.m. and leaves work at 7:15 p.m.

Johann Hari: 00:54:50 I started to think, "Could this have some effect on our mental health?" I learned there was an amazing Australian social scientist called Professor Michael Marmot who made a big breakthrough about this in the 70s, so I went to interview him. Professor Marmot discovered the key factor that causes depression at work. It's not the only one but it's the biggest. If you go to work tomorrow and you have low or no control over your work, you are much more likely to become depressed and anxious. I think and I'm going beyond what Professor Marmot says now, that this is related to what we're saying about human needs. We evolve to feel good when we think we're good at something, to feel that what we're doing has meaning. If you feel that you're controlled, if you feel like you're a Skinnerite drone on a line, you can't create meaning out of your work.

Johann Hari: 00:55:34 But when I learned this initially, I actually misunderstood what this evidence meant. So, I thought it meant, okay, you've got this elite 13% of people at the top who get to have these nice, fancy lives, control their work and then you've got everyone else who's condemned to this shit. I'm like, "Well, my grandmother's job was to clean toilets. My dad was a bus driver. My brother is an Uber driver." We saying that like most people in the economy are just condemned, but as Professor Marmot said to me, it's not the work that makes you depressed. It's being controlled at work, and there's a way we can deal with that. So, it's an argument for a big structural change in the economy but we've all lived through big structural changes in all sorts of ways.

Johann Hari: 00:56:12 So, to understand this, I went to interview a woman called Meredith Keogh. Meredith, she was in Baltimore and Meredith used to go to bed every Sunday night just sick with anxiety. She

had an office job and she would tell you it wasn't the worst office job in the world. She wasn't being bullied or harassed, but it was monotonous, it was boring. She had very little control. She couldn't bear the thought this was going to be the next 40 years of her life till she retired.

Johann Hari: 00:56:36 So, one day with her husband, Josh, Meredith did this quite bold thing. Josh had worked in bike stores since he was a teenager in Baltimore, which is controlled work, very insecure work. You have very few rights.

Johann Hari: 00:56:47 One day, Josh and his colleagues were sitting in their store and one of them asked, "What does that boss actually do?" They quite liked their boss. He wasn't an asshole but they were like, "We seem to fix all the bikes. This other dude seems to make all the money. It doesn't feel like such a good deal for us."

Johann Hari: 00:57:03 They decided they were going to set up a bike store that worked on a different principle. The previous store they worked at was a corporation. Everyone listening to this knows what a corporation is. Most people work in them. It's a very recent human invention. So, corporation is structured like an army or like a dictatorship with the boss at the top makes the decisions. Sometimes, he's a nice dictator who listens to the population. Sometimes, he's Kim Jong-un and you've got no say over that but if you ultimately don't agree with the guy at the top, then you just have to get out.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:31 Or you could have a giant asshole that you're working directly underneath who is shielding you from a better boss above him or her.

Johann Hari: 00:57:39 Yeah. That's impossible to know.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:40 I think a lot of people have that experience.

Johann Hari: 00:57:42 They decided they were going to set up a bike store that worked on a different principle. So, Baltimore Bicycle Works, their store is not a corporation. It's based on an old American idea. It's a democratic cooperative. There are many democratic cooperatives across the United States.

Johann Hari: 00:57:57 So, they don't have a boss. They take the decisions about the business together by voting once every couple of weeks. They share out the profits. They share out the good tasks and the shitty tasks. If anyone has an idea about how to make the

business better, they can persuade their colleagues or at least try to.

- Johann Hari:** 00:58:12 One of the things that was fascinating, spending time with the people in Baltimore Bicycle Works was how many of them talked about how they used to be depressed and anxious in this previous way of working but were not depressed and anxious now. It's important to say, it's not like they gave up their jobs fixing bikes and went off to become Beyoncé's backing singers, right?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:58:32 Yeah.
- Johann Hari:** 00:58:32 They fixed bikes before. They fix bikes now. What's the difference? Now, they've got control over their work. Now, I would argue and I think it's very good evidence, there is no reason we need to be structuring our society, so most of us are spending most of our waking lives in institutions that make us feel like shit. Every business can be a democratic cooperative. It's not even good for the economy.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:58:53 Well, it doesn't even have to be a democratic cooperative. I mean, after reading your book, I went to investigate this matter because there are certain businesses in New York that I attend frequently or go to for services where I'm struck by how pleasant and happy the staff is. One of them is called the Grey Dog café. It's on 12th Street and University.
- Johann Hari:** 00:59:11 Yeah. I know them. Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:59:12 Yeah. The staff is remarkable. They're so happy. They're so easygoing and so pleasant and I ask them. There's also a very old pharmacy on 6th Avenue called Bigelow pharmacy, Bigelow Chemists. Same thing. The thing I found over and over again when I went, and again, I was spurred to do this because I read your book and I was going to have you on the show and I kept it in my mind. They talked about what are the things that was up at the very top of the list was that they were listened to, that they were heard, that they felt like their input, their thoughts, those things mattered. I think that's very important.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:59:47 Also, just in the interest of time, Johann, I want to list off those nine causes of depression, anxiety that you have in the book, just so that our listeners have some idea of that and, of course, they can read your book.

Johann Hari: 01:00:00 They can sound a bit weird out of context, but I just stress, that's the first third of the book, and the most of the book is about the solutions but yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:00:07 There is, and we'll get into that and there's also, as I said, a lot about the scientific studies. I think the most compelling point on terms of the research, very early on, it has to do with the work of Irving Kirsch, which was basically dismantling the data or the argument built on top of the data to support the pharmaceutical industry's antidepressant drugs, which was interestingly enough, it's an interesting story we need to summarize it but Kirsch's argument was that the data didn't support the argument that was put forward and that in order to combat that, the ... Who was the researcher that combated Kirsch?

Johann Hari: 01:00:46 Peter Kramer.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:00:46 Kramer. Kramer's point was that, well, actually the data itself is flawed, so you can't argue the conclusion, which basically meant that the entire edifice of the data upon which all the conclusions were built was corrupted.

Johann Hari: 01:00:58 Yeah. I mean, I think it's important to stress that there is some evidence that chemical antidepressants do have more benefit than placebo in the first two months. There's very robust scientific evidence for that, and it's important to stress it. But what I found most shocking, actually, and Professor Kirsch points that out as much as anyone else, but what I found most shocking actually is that there's basically almost no research into the long-term effects of chemical antidepressants. The best study we have is something called the STAR*D trial, which just is very simple and it's very hard to rig. You just follow people who go to their doctors saying they're depressed. Follow the different options and follow them over time to see what happens and the STAR*D trial showed chemical antidepressants gave people some relief but most people taking them did become depressed again.

Johann Hari: 01:01:43 In a way, this was the most controversial part of the book and I was kind of surprised because I feel like it's almost a crudely obvious what I'm saying about chemical antidepressants which is, "Yeah, they give a bit of relief but they're not solving the problem." Look around you. If they were solving the problem, we wouldn't have a situation where every year depression and anxiety go up and up and up. This doesn't mean they give no relief to anyone. They do give some relief to some people as they indeed did to me but we've obviously got to have a much

wider expanded menu of options because this problem is so much deeper than just the biology.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:02:15 I want people that are listening who either are depressed, have been depressed or have loved ones who are depressed or people they care about. This book is inviting to read because Johann talks about it from a first person perspective. You give a great story when you were in the office of your therapist, and your therapist said basically something along the lines of, "Well, you kind of seem depressed. You seem kind of like the way you said you used to be," because you would tell them that you're so much better because you were taking these antidepressants. Your reaction was to get kind of pissed off, kind of annoyed, like, "Who are you? What the hell? You going to tell me? Don't you understand? Don't you read? Don't you know that these drugs are saving my life," right?
- Johann Hari:** 01:02:55 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:02:55 And, of course, that is a reaction to defend because the thought that maybe the story you had been told wasn't entirely accurate or maybe there were some nuance to it, invaded this sort of answer that was helping you cope.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:03:10 So, I actually, without going too much in all sorts of different directions, my point in bringing that up was to say that I don't mean by my words or by what I said about the data to suggest that anyone's experience of depression is not real, nor to suggest that the drugs they take may not or have not bettered their lives in certain cases substantially, depending on what your particular condition is. I simply mean it as part of this larger point that you make in the book, which I agree with, which is that there has been, I think, a dramatic overprescription of these drugs and not just with antidepressants, with Ritalin, with Adderall. Kids-
- Johann Hari:** 01:03:51 Yeah. I think rather than prescription, I would talk about overbiologization of the problem-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:03:52 Absolutely.
- Johann Hari:** 01:03:53 ... more broadly but there's something that really happened because I found that, of all the insights I learned for the book, that was one of the hardest, because this was the one thing I had been given that I was told would help me. It did give me some help initially. And to then be told this story that actually that does help some people but is relatively limited and that the

wider story I was told that it's just about low serotonin is not true, as the leading expert of Princeton, Professor Andrew Scull says, "It's deeply misleading and unscientific to say depression is just caused by low serotonin."

- Johann Hari:** 01:04:27 I found that very disorientating. If you have a story about your pain, even if that story isn't working very well for you and it clearly didn't work very well for me, at least you feel like you know where you are. There's a moment in the adjustment of the story where you feel profoundly disorientated.
- Johann Hari:** 01:04:42 But one of the ways I found out of that, that led me onto the much wider research after that very difficult first day, that is actually where I'd gotten stuck writing the book for many years. I was like, "This is too painful. I can't look at this." When I went to interview the South African psychiatrist called Derek Summerfield, who is a great guy. He happened to be in Cambodia in 2001 when they introduced chemical antidepressants for the first time in that country.
- Johann Hari:** 01:05:04 The local doctors, the Cambodians, had never heard of these drugs so they were like, "What are they?" He explained. They said to him, "We don't need them. We've already got antidepressants." He said, "What do you mean?" He thought they were going to talk about some kind of herbal remedy like St. John's Wart, ginkgo biloba, something like that.
- Johann Hari:** 01:05:21 Instead, they told him a story. There was a farmer in their community who worked in the rice fields. One day, he stood on a landmine left over from the war with the United States and he got his leg blown off. So, they gave him an artificial leg and he goes back to work in the rice fields, but apparently, it's really painful to work underwater when you've got artificial leg. I'm guessing it's pretty traumatic to go back and work in the fields where you've been blown up. The guy starts to cry all day, doesn't want to get out of bed. He develops classic depression.
- Johann Hari:** 01:05:50 The doctors, the Cambodians said to him, "Well, that's when we gave him an antidepressant." Dr. Summerfield said, "What?" They explained that they went and sat with him. They listened to him. They realized that his pain made sense. It had identifiable causes. One of them thought if we bought him a cow, he could work with that. He wouldn't have to work in the fields anymore. So, they decided to buy him a cow so he could become a dairy farmer.
- Johann Hari:** 01:06:17 Within a couple of weeks, his crying stopped. Within a couple of months, his depression was gone. They said to Dr. Summerfield,

"So, you see, Doctor, that cow, that's an antidepressant. That's what you mean, right?"

- Johann Hari:** 01:06:27 Now, if you've been raised to think about depression the way we have, that sounds like a bad joke. I went to my doctor for an antidepressant. She gave me a cow, but what those Cambodian doctors knew intuitively is precisely what the leading medical body in the world, the World Health Organization, has been trying to tell us for years. If you're depressed, if you're anxious, you're not weak. You're not a machine with broken parts. You're a human being with unmet needs and what you need is practical help to get those needs met.
- Johann Hari:** 01:06:52 It's important to know what those Cambodian doctors weren't saying. They weren't saying, "Well, this isn't primarily a biological problem, so you've got to solve it, buddy. It's all on you." Because they have a very deep belief that there is a society. They instinctively found a social solution to this problem. I think part of the problem why this insight is so hard to digest in this culture is because if you come along and you say the biology has been overstated, what a lot of people hear is, "Fuck! So, you're saying, 'I've got to solve it myself as a [crosstalk 01:07:21] individual.' I can't do that." And you go, "You're absolutely right. There's a third option, which is neither purely biologically broken nor you as an isolated individual, which is we as humans can do what we have always done which is, as tribes, solve our problems together."
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:07:36 And there's the disconnection causing a vicious cycle, right?
- Johann Hari:** 01:07:40 Exactly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:07:40 So, another interesting point is that you brought up Robert Sapolsky's research in chimpanzee troops or baboons in Africa. You mentioned, larger point, you had some beautiful lines, actually. Your point was about the fact that in the wild, almost you never see a depressed baboon.
- Johann Hari:** 01:08:03 Well, you do in very limited circumstances.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:08:05 Limited circumstances where it makes sense. They were the head of the troop and they were deposed or they're at the very, very bottom. They've been slighted, but it's temporary. They're temporary symptoms of depression, but it goes away. It isn't a permanent feature whereas animals in captivity behave very differently. That had to do with your point about nature but I think the larger point that I think I was trying to make is that we

all have tendencies. We know people who tend towards depression. This is not, in my view, controversial. And there are certain people, no matter what you do to them, nothing gets them down. They're remarkable. But I think the vast majority of us fall somewhere in the middle of that.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:08:47 In a profoundly sick society, to speak of Krishnamurti, why on Earth, for example, would it not occur to anyone that living in a city like New York, where so many people on your way to work and on your way back to work, you will see people living on the street in poverty, in destitution, which psychological illnesses, unkempt, physical illnesses and this is not supposed to upset you? This is not supposed to impact you? There's so many other aspects of our society that are so sick which I think drive so many people over the edge, people who maybe they're diagnosed as significantly depressed but they would not be in a different society. I don't have an easy answer for that. You have some in the book and I just wanted to make that point because I'm not trying to bifurcate people here. I agree with your point about this being a larger societal phenomenon and it's impacting people.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:09:40 Before we go into the overtime, Johann, I just want to mention these nine causes because I want people to have them in their mind. One of them we spoke about. It's meaningful work. I completely agree with that.
- Johann Hari:** 01:09:50 Just disconnection from meaningful work, yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:09:51 Disconnection from meaningful work. Another one is disconnection from other people. We discussed that. Another one is a values, disconnection from meaningful values. Another one that we didn't really talk about, I don't think, is disconnection from a hopeful, secure future. Of course, people that are depressed tend to lose a sense of hope, lose a sense of the future. I think that's a powerful one. We really didn't go into that but that's, I think, a big one in the book.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:10:14 Another one is you talked about it as disconnection from childhood trauma. I imagine this also just applies to trauma more broadly, if you were in a war zone and you experienced trauma, if you had cancer, that is dramatic experience and that's a difficult one to reintegrate. Disconnection from status and respect. I think we touched on it here and there, certainly with work. Certainly, I also wonder to what extent this is impacting so much of a populism and the nationalism, right?
- Johann Hari:** 01:10:38 Absolutely.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:10:39 This huge gap in wealth and power in society. Disconnection from nature, we didn't discuss that. Really, we kind of touched on it with a baboon. I believe in that fully when I get out of the city, I am nourished. When I see the sun, I am nourished. When I walk on grass or I walk on a beach, I feel differently. I think that that it is absolutely true, and I think this is one where we do benefit from the body of scientific evidence and studies because it makes absolute sense that an animal that evolved in a natural environment would miss something from being in that environment.

Johann Hari: 01:11:13 Well, animals go crazy in zoos when they're deprived of their natural habitat. This is called zoochosis. Horses will start to obsessively sway. Elephants will grind their tusks, which are great source of pride-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:11:22 Those were the quotes that I was trying to pull from you.

Johann Hari: 01:11:24 ... in the wild, down to these bloody stumps. Parrots will rip out their feathers. There's a lot of evidence that exposure to the natural world, that being deprived of the habitat we evolved for is disastrous as far as being exposed to it.

Johann Hari: 01:11:35 So, for example, the state prison in Michigan. It wasn't designed this way, just by coincidence, has one part that looks out over beautiful greenery and another part that looks out over a bare concrete parking lot. The study, it was random, where you ended up in the prison but it found that the people who looked out over lush greenery were 20% less likely to develop mental health problems of all kinds. So, one of the things that's going on is a kind of zoochosis for our species. We didn't evolve to live in these habitats.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:12:03 Yeah. You write in the book, I don't know if this is exactly a quote or if it's a mishmash of my own words and your words but you wrote, "We know from other a century of observing animals in captivity that when they're deprived of their natural habitat, they will often develop symptoms that looked like extreme forms of depression. Parrots will rip out their own feathers. Horses will start unstopably swaying. Elephants will start to grind their tusks, their source of strength and pride in the wild, against the walls of their cells until they are gnarled stumps. Some elephants in captivity are so traumatized, they sleep upright for years, moving their bodies neurotically the whole time. None of these species ever behaved this way in the wild. You make the further point, this is why it's so difficult for animals to mate in captivity because they lose their sex drive.

Johann Hari: 01:12:48 My friend Isabel Behncke, who should totally interview. She's based here in New York a lot of the time. She's incredible Chilean primatologist and one of the most extraordinary people I know. I remember talking to her about this. She explained a lot of this evidence. I mean, she said she would only explain it to me if I agreed to walk up a mountain with her. I said, "Well, what lesson should we take from this?" She looked at me and said, "Fuck captivity." Loads of humans are effectively living in captivity, and I don't just mean the people who were literally in prisons. She said, "Fuck captivity." No human, no species enjoys living in captivity. The fact that we are reacting in ways the other animal species — We are, of course, an animal species ourselves. — only react to when they are put in cages tells you something about the environment we've constructed and how we need to change our environment and how we can change our environment.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:13:36 Yeah. The last two had to do with genes and the brain. I want to go into the overtime, Johann. I also want to talk about, among other things, in terms of solutions. I want to discuss the work you've done researching psychedelic therapies.

Johann Hari: 01:13:49 Sure.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:13:50 I find these very promising. One of the other things I was thinking about when we were talking was how healing this must have been for you to speak to so many people coming from your own experience.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:13:59 I had an experience of my own dealing with death, and I had organized the conference on death and dying some years ago in New York, and I found it remarkably healing speaking about grief, about pain. Sharing my pain, sharing my grief. I think that speaks to the point of we don't want to muffle the pain. I mean, again, I'm not trying to in any way suggest what anyone should or should not do or that drugs do not work or do work for certain people, but I do agree with the point that you made in the book about the apple and the pain. The pain is a symptom. It's a sign. It's a signal. It's telling us something. And we would be wise to listen, irrespective of whether or not we take a drug or we try and treat it, it's important to be present with our pain because so much of the suffering comes from being unwilling to acknowledge or recognize it, right?

Johann Hari: 01:14:54 Yeah, and because we created a culture that doesn't give people space to feel pain, right?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:14:58 Yes.

Johann Hari: 01:14:58 Because you're meant to be, "Hey, back at work tomorrow morning, 7:30," right?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:15:02 Yes, yes, yes.

Johann Hari: 01:15:02 "No time. Your baby's dead? Get back to work," right?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:15:05 Yes, yes, yes.

Johann Hari: 01:15:06 I mean, to use a very extreme form of grief.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:15:07 Yes. So, for those who are subscribers, you know the drill. If you have been a long-time listener or a new listener but are not a subscriber to Hidden Forces, you can learn more about the subscription at hiddenforces.io/subscribe, or you can head straight over to patreon.com/hiddenforces and you can find out about all the different subscription tiers. If you want access to this week's rundown, there's a tier for that as well. I highly recommend it. It's full of all sorts of great links and materials and images and all sorts of outlines around Johann's book or you can just buy Johann's book. Just take my word for it, it's a phenomenal book. So, stick around Johann.

Johann Hari: 01:15:49 I get told off by my publishers if I don't say this. There is an audiobook of the book as well and if anyone wants any more information about the book, if they want to take a quiz to see how much they know about the causes of depression, anxiety, or they want to listen to audio clips of loads of the people that we've been talking about, you go to www.thelostconnections.com and there's where you can follow me on social media and all that stuff, too.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:16:07 Exactly. I can recommend Johann's book, and he did the commendable job of narrating it himself.

Johann Hari: 01:16:14 Oh! Hurray!

Demetri Kofinas: 01:16:14 Yeah. So, if you love his voice, which I told him is a, before we started recording, it's a pleasant mix between very street-ish, street, UK language and more posh language, something in between, which is very nice. Johann, stick around and we'll get into the solutions that you talk about in the book or some of the sort of ways forward and also-

Johann Hari: 01:16:33 Brilliant!

Demetri Kofinas: 01:16:33 ... psychedelic stuff.

Johann Hari:	01:16:34	Hurray!
Demetri Kofinas:	01:16:35	And that was my episode with Johann Hari. I want to thank Johann for being on my program. Today's episode of Hidden Forces was recorded at Creative Media Design studios in New York City.
Demetri Kofinas:	01:16:47	For more information about this week's episode or if you want easy access to related programming, visit our website at hiddenforces.io and subscribe to our free email list. If you want access to overtime segments, episode transcripts, and show rundowns full of links and detailed information related to each and every episode, check out our premium subscription, available through the Hidden Forces website or through our Patreon page.
Demetri Kofinas:	01:17:16	Today's episode was produced by me and edited by Stylianos Nicolaou. For more episodes, you can check out our website at hiddenforces.io . Join the conversation at Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram at hiddenforcespod or send me an email. As always, thanks for listening. We'll see you next week.