

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00 The Hidden Forces Podcast features long form conversations broken into two parts, the second hour of which is made available to our premium subscribers, along with transcripts and notes to each conversation. For more information about how to access the episode overtimes, transcripts and rundowns, head over to patreon.com/hiddenforces. You can also sign up to our mailing list at hiddenforces.io. Follow us on Twitter @HiddenForcesPod, and leave us a review on Apple podcasts. And with that, please enjoy this week's episode.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54 What's up everybody. My name is Demetri Kofinas, and you're listening to Hidden Forces, a podcast that helps investors, entrepreneurs, and everyday citizens get an edge by equipping themselves with the knowledge needed to anticipate the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. By sharing my critical thinking approach and by challenging consensus narratives about the power structures shaping our world, I help you make the connections to see the bigger picture, empowering you to make smarter decisions.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:27 On this week's episode, I speak with Noreena Hertz, a renowned thought leader, academic, and broadcaster, named by the Observer as "one of the world's leading thinkers", and by Vogue, as "one of the world's most inspiring women." Over the course of her career, she has grappled with issues of political economy, markets, business, culture, and technology, and in her latest book, "The Lonely Century," she draws from that wellspring of experience and knowledge as well as from her research in the fields of psychology, philosophy and evolutionary biology in an effort to understand how our growing sense of loneliness and isolation from ourselves and from each other is contributing to much of the social instability, political dysfunction and existential angst that many of us experience in our daily lives.

Demetri Kofinas: 02:19 I think most of us when we think of loneliness, think of physical and emotional isolation, lack of community, or intimacy. And while such characterizations of loneliness are certainly accurate, Noreena's own definition is much more expansive and includes a much broader set of relationships whose ruination lead to feelings of exclusion from the world at large, from the systems of power that each of us relies on to make our way in the world, our vital economic, political, and social cultural organizations and structures.

Demetri Kofinas: 02:53 The purpose of today's conversation is not only to help you understand the scale of a loneliness epidemic and its drivers, but also to draw the connections between its more visible effects like mental and emotional illness, and those whose pathways and relationships remain largely hidden.

Demetri Kofinas: 03:12 As you will learn during the course of today's conversation, there is good reason to believe that loneliness has a role to play in everything, from rising levels of political polarization and social instability, to rising environmental degradation and neglect.

Demetri Kofinas: 03:28 In the subscriber overtime, Noreena and I delve deeper into the health consequences of isolation, as well as how the world of online dating has impacted intimacy in a way that is rarely discussed. We also consider solutions both at the individual and community levels that Noreena thinks can immediately begin to help stem this rising tide of loneliness that impacts so

many people in society today. So with that, please enjoy this touching and thoughtful conversation with my guest, Noreena Hertz.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 04:05 Noreena Hertz, welcome to Hidden Forces.
- Noreena Hertz:** 04:08 Thank you so much Demetri for having me on.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 04:11 It's great to have you on. You and I were talking about where we're located. I was telling you I was in New York. What about you?
- Noreena Hertz:** 04:16 I'm in London. I am in London. This is where I have spent locked down in my local neighborhood.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 04:27 Well, first of all, I wonder how it's differed by neighborhood, but how has it been in London recently? I know that you guys have had a harder time with it later on. I mean, New York started, obviously we had the lockdowns back in March and we got hit early, but it seems like the UK has gotten hit pretty hard.
- Noreena Hertz:** 04:44 Yes. We've been in very strict lockdown since December actually whereby you're not even allowed to meet out with a friend in the street unless you're going for a walk with them. But you're not allowed to sit on a park bench with anyone even, let alone have anyone come around your garden or apartment or anything. No shops open apart from essential shops. I mean, similar in some ways I think to the New York experience and the Californian one, but pretty full on. I am missing just sitting in a cafe and having a coffee.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 05:26 So you can't do that right now in London?
- Noreena Hertz:** 05:28 No.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 05:29 That's interesting. We've been able to do that for a long time in New York. Yeah. Well, they've set up... You can even do indoor now. It's interesting also speaking to people who are in different cities. I mean, people that are in Miami, they have a completely different experience. It's almost like there's no pandemic at all. I wonder how much... I mean, my sense was that from the beginning, our emotional response to the pandemic and our conception of it mentally felt extreme and disconnected from the facts of what it was and what we needed to do on the ground in order just to be responsible around it. Did you get that feeling as well that there's been just too much of an ominous cloud around this thing?
- Noreena Hertz:** 06:14 No, I actually think the science and the facts did beget legitimate fear and concern and the strict lockdowns were and have been the appropriate response. Yeah. I definitely feel that. And even though it's been really tough, I think it's been the right strategy. Because we saw in the UK when we weren't in lockdown... We came to it really late. We weren't shutting our airports and we were not really taking it seriously enough. I've experienced the worst death toll per capita really anywhere in the world. And it's only when we locked down properly that we started seeing that fall. So I actually think the response has been appropriate, yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 07:09 How has it been going with vaccinations in the UK?

Noreena Hertz: 07:13 The good news is that today it was announced that everyone over the age of 50 is now eligible for a vaccine. We're actually doing really well on that front. I think we're second or third in the world when it comes to percentage of people vaccinated. Of course the numbers are not quite comparable because in the UK we have a 12 week lag between vaccine one and vaccine two, which is not actually the recommended lag for vaccine like Pfizer, but that's what the British government has decided to do in order to get the most people possible vaccinated or on that path to vaccine. But it's a good feeling. I've had my first jab and it's actually a really good feeling. It feels like a path back to normality, which is big relief. How about you?

Demetri Kofinas: 08:10 Well, I have not taken the vaccine. I don't know if I'm eligible yet. I don't think I'm eligible yet to take it in New York. But yeah, I mean, to be honest, I'm probably going to take it. I've wanted to wait as long as possible to see the results. I know that recently in Europe, the Astrazeneca vaccine has been suspended. There are now questions about why it's been suspended. Was it done for political reasons? My parents have gotten the vaccine. I'm certainly not like someone who's against vaccines, I just think it's something that I've wanted to try and hold off on as long as possible. But in any case, I haven't been eligible to get it yet. So I feel like by the time I'm eligible, I think we will have gotten enough evidence, at least on the short-term consequences of it.

Demetri Kofinas: 08:56 I think it's complicated especially for women that are trying to get pregnant because on the one hand, if you get COVID during your pregnancy, that's really bad because of the endothelial components of it or aspects of the disease. Simultaneously, there's concerns about what would be the consequences for women trying to get pregnant taking it. So I don't know. I think there's just a lot of concern around the fact that it's a novel vaccine and there's also a lot of misinformation online that scares people.

Noreena Hertz: 09:25 For sure. Of course it's a big decision. We've never seen vaccines come to market this quickly. So I think a degree of healthy caution is definitely warranted. But the reality is that much of our lives are not going to be accessible to those who have not been vaccinated, or much of our old lives, especially travel, in Europe at least. If you want to get on a plane, if you want to get out of the UK, I think if you're not vaccinated, the number of countries who are going to welcome us will be very limited. And as somebody who pre the pandemic was on a plane probably every few weeks, I definitely feel that I want to be able to be global again. I think that's been one of the interesting things through the past year is that the extent to which our own personal agency has been kind of curtailed, and sometimes we're having to make choices that for some people maybe wouldn't have been a choice they would have made ordinarily, but for pragmatic reasons they're making it.

Demetri Kofinas: 10:42 Yeah, totally. That for me is a big one as well, travel; and also just not infecting people, particularly people that I care about, if I were to get the virus. Noreena, we have so much to talk about today. The pandemic is obviously relevant. I mean, you mentioned the park benches in the UK. Clearly the open-to-talk benches are also closed. Yeah, we'll get into that for listeners. But can you just

tell me a little bit about your background, because it looks like you got a PhD in economics, if I'm not mistaken, you have also an MBA. So you come from this economic background, and I've seen that you've also written at least one book dealing with debt and the economy. What is your background and how did you arrive at an interest in this particular topic and writing a book on loneliness?

- Noreena Hertz:** 11:32 Great question. Yes, I did an MBA at Wharton in the United States. I was in Philadelphia. I actually went and did my MBA when I was really young. I think I was the youngest person in my year. I was just 21 when I went to do it. And when I graduated, it was in 1991. So it was the summer of '91 when the Soviet Union was collapsing that summer. One of my professors had asked me if I wanted to go and help with an assignment he had been hired to do, which was to set up the first stock exchange in Russia. I thought, what an incredible opportunity and I went off to do that.
- Noreena Hertz:** 12:22 When I was in Russia, I got very interested in, as one might have, in what was going on in this incredible period of transition. I thought, wouldn't it be cool to actually go back to university and do a PhD looking at what kind of an economy was emerging in Russia, and really could you design a market economy from the top down, which was the belief at the time; the belief from the IMF and the World Bank that you could just kind of create something in Russia that would look pretty much like America. I thought this is really interesting.
- Noreena Hertz:** 13:01 And so I actually worked and did my PhD at Cambridge simultaneously for the next few years, working first for the IFC, the sister organization of the World Bank in Russia, and then working for Credit Suisse First Boston. And at the same time studying, analyzing what was happening in Russia. So my degree was in economics, but I was always really interested and have been throughout my career and my subsequent career in the way that real world interactions on the ground impact economic change and political change. And I've always been interested in the intersection between economics and politics, businesses and people's beliefs, feelings, emotions, psychology.
- Noreena Hertz:** 13:54 So that's been the space that I've always been interested in. And my PhD was actually looking at economic reform in Russia, but I did it by tracking a group of Russian factories for three years in the early '90s and seeing how they were changing and how they were being affected and seeing how that was then kind of actually shaping what type of economy was emerging, and was that really the economy that was top-down supposed to be being designed. Yeah, so that was kind of the beginning of my career. And then throughout my career, I've always mixed real world work with an academic path and went on to teach at Cambridge and be at Cambridge for many years, and then moved to London where I'm now at University College London.
- Noreena Hertz:** 14:51 So a book on loneliness isn't the most obvious book to have written and my first big bestseller was about global capitalism. My next book was about global debt. And my third book was about decision-making. This is my non-academic book. And my fourth, this book, my most recent book is on loneliness, and I came to it really for three very different reasons. First, it was my students. What I observed was that more and more were coming into my office in office hours and telling me that they were feeling very lonely and isolated, and this was a

new phenomenon. It wasn't something I'd seen in the past and I was very struck by it. I was also struck by how when I was setting group assignments, increasing numbers seemed to be finding this quite challenging, just the basic face-to-face in-person interaction. And so I found that interesting.

- Noreena Hertz:** 15:53 At the same time, as my students were telling me they were lonely and I was observing that they seemed to be finding it harder to interact in person, in my academic research, I was looking at the rise of right-wing populism across the globe. So whether in France, Le Pen; in Germany, alternative for Deutschland; in Italy, the League; or of course in the United States, Trump. And as I started interviewing and hearing from people who were voting for right-wing populist parties, one thing that kept on coming across from their stories was how lonely and isolated they felt. So again, loneliness, but in a very different sphere.
- Noreena Hertz:** 16:40 And then at roughly the same time I had bought an Alexa. I'm sorry if now everyone's Alexas go off, but I had bought an Alexa. Observing my own interaction with my Alexa and seeing how kind of attached I was becoming to my Alexa device got me thinking about what I've come to define as the loneliness economy, a whole market for goods and services designed to alleviate loneliness, deliver connection, and at best deliver community. And as I thought about the loneliness economy and realized that this was something that was really expanding before the pandemic, and maybe we'll come back to this, it showed, again, something was going on; that's there's a real demand out there, a market for people who taught to meet the needs of people who were feeling lonely, some disconnected.
- Noreena Hertz:** 17:45 So I was seeing loneliness in all these different ways. And I guess the way my brain works is that I see patterns. This was a really interesting pattern that I had recognized and I thought, okay, I want to dig into this much more. And that's why I spent three years really researching contemporary loneliness and making sense of why this, even before the pandemic struck, was the lonely century, and figuring out what this meant, what the opportunities were, what the challenges were and what we could do about it.
- Noreena Hertz:** 18:25 And of course the pandemic, which struck just as I was finishing my book, and then I held my book back and kind of wove the first few months of the pandemic through it. Of course the pandemic has just accelerated and exacerbated how lonely we are. Before the pandemic, one in five Americans said that they felt lonely often or always. One in five millennials said that they didn't have a single friend at all. 40% of office workers said that they were lonely at work. But where we are today, a year into the pandemic, we're talking around 50% of Americans saying that they feel lonely right now.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 19:08 Well, the connection between loneliness and I think also the way in which our society has become primed to focus on the individual and experiences are tailor made for individuals. And you go through this in the book as well, cities designed for the individual. The relationship between that and populism, but also just political stability, is a very interesting one. It's one I don't really often hear discussed, and I want to discuss it with you today. You mentioned what you'd been seeing in your own students. In your book, you actually mentioned, I think it was Boston College, a professor at Boston College was noticing that

students didn't know how to ask people out on a date in person. That this was something, if I remember correctly, it was one of the first questions that they had for her.

- Noreena Hertz:** 20:00 Yeah. She was giving a lecture and after which she was expecting questions to be on the content. I mean, it was around the subject of dating. She was not prepared for questions coming up to her asking really, how do you ask someone out for a date in real life? She decided to have a four credit course on how to ask someone out for a date in real life course. And she did that there, but I actually found out that another American University, a prestigious Ivy league university whose name I won't divulge, that they were finding that so many incoming students were struggling with in-person interactions in general that they are running remedial how to read a face in real life classes for their incoming students. Literally, if you're in a room and somebody's smiling, that means the meeting's going well. And if they're frowning, it means it's going badly.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 21:05 Around the time that I started this show, before I started it in the summer of 2016, I went through, it was like the third time in my life that I've done this, where I've gone through a cycle of reading many, many books. Some of the books I read which related to things like this were Alone Together, Sherry Turkle's book. I also read The Shallows and The Glass Cage, both by Nicholas Carr. So I guess what's most surprising to me is how unsurprising this is. I mean, this is exactly what they told us would happen. If a generation of kids was raised on social media and internet enabled mobile devices with less interpersonal interaction, that they wouldn't be able to develop these skills, that they would struggle with things like empathy. So how surprising is this, really?
- Noreena Hertz:** 21:48 I think the writing was obviously on the wall and people like Sherry Turkle called it out early on. Until about a year and a half ago though, we just didn't have the research data to be able to prove, for example, that being on Facebook makes you lonelier because even though there was a clear correlation between rising levels of loneliness amongst young people and smartphone usage and social media usage, from about 2010 we really can see this very clearly, we didn't know, we couldn't know for sure. We could infer and suppose, but we didn't know for sure whether this was a causal relationship. And even if it was, what direction it went in.
- Noreena Hertz:** 22:37 But about a year and a half ago, there was a seminal study done by Stanford University, which was then replicated in other places. It was a real gold standard of a study. They had 1,500 students in a control group. They were told to use Facebook as usual. And then they had 1,500 students who were charged with actually stopping using Facebook for two months. And then they monitored kind of how the students felt, et cetera, and how they acted, behaved. And it was very interesting what they found.
- Noreena Hertz:** 23:11 Firstly, they found that students who had stopped using Facebook didn't just go on other platforms more, they actually did much more in-person with friends and family. And secondly, they found that they were considerably happier. And thirdly, that they were significantly less lonely. And there've been other similar studies whereby people are actually charged with behaving differently, like

stopping using social media, and then how they feel examined, and these have replicated these results. So yes, the writing was definitely on the wall and they were kind of visionary, but we didn't have the empirical data to support it really until about a year and a half ago. And now we've had a number of studies that do so.

- Noreena Hertz:** 24:02 Of course it makes sense. It makes sense that if you're migrating your relationships online, that these are inferior types of modes of communication, so it is going to have an impact on the real world. And of course it makes sense that if you're spending your time in a toxic environment where there's lots of bullying and hate as unfortunately, especially for young people, can be the case on social media. In the United Kingdom, one in three women aged between 18 to 24 have experienced abuse on Facebook. 65% of UK students have experienced bullying on social media platforms directly. Of course, if you're in that sort of environment, it's going to feel more lonely. Of course if your devices are designed to be so addictive that they're pulling you away from being actually present with those in a room around you, you're going to feel more lonely. So it kind of all made sense. But now we, on top of that, have these really impressive, good, large scale studies to back that up as well.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 25:16 I think it would help to clarify for people. I mean, you sort of touched on it when you brought up politics, populism, and also technology, that your definition of loneliness is more expansive than most people's. So I guess my first question is, what is your interpretation of what most people mean when they talk about loneliness and how do you define it?
- Noreena Hertz:** 25:38 Most people, when you think what does loneliness mean, you probably are thinking a feeling of craving companionship or a feeling that you lack intimacy, like closeness to those around you. And those are of course manifestations of loneliness. But I define loneliness as not only feeling disconnected from those closest to you, but also about feeling disconnected from the government and from your employer. I define loneliness as not only feeling invisible and unheard by those in your most immediate sphere, but also about feeling this sense of not existing, not being heard, not being seen when it comes to your workplace or your relationship with your state. So for me, loneliness is political as well as personal, and its drivers are not only technological, but also economic, demographic, as well as of course around the choices we make about how we lead our lives today.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 26:56 How did we get here? I mean, obviously technology is one part of this conversation and we touched on it a little bit already, but how do you explain it? How far back do you go? Because I also wonder, to what degree... I mean, for example, like in the 1950s and 60s, society itself was, at least if you were white in the United States, you had a greater sense of common identity as being an American, and there were all sorts of reasons for that. We had just got out of the most destructive world war in human history, the Cold War was in its infancy. But for example, if you were a housewife living in suburban America, you could, depending, be experiencing a great deal of loneliness. And that's around the time when we began to see the development of a lot of drugs to deal with depression and anxiety. So how do you, I guess, take apart all these

different manifestations of loneliness and come to a sense that loneliness in the aggregate has grown in the last 50, 60 years?

- Noreena Hertz:** 28:00 I mean, of course there have always been people and particular groups of people who have felt disproportionately lonelier, and loneliness isn't a new phenomenon by any means. But why I can say confidently that we know that it's been growing is that we do have longitudinal data on loneliness. This is of course aggregate data. So not necessarily by groups, although in some cases it is by groups where we can see a trend where we can see loneliness increasing over the past few decades. The longitudinal data that exists shows a rising trends and it makes sense that it does because as you rightly say, I don't say that technology is the only driver. It is a driver, but it's definitely not the only one. There's a whole host of reasons which help explain why today is the lonelier century and why it was even before the pandemic struck.
- Noreena Hertz:** 29:06 We've started to touch upon kind of the role that our increasingly individualistic mindset has played in today's loneliness crisis, and it clearly is part of the picture. Really, if you think back to the 1980s, that was when... So that was under Reagan and Thatcher. Reagan in the United States, Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. That was when a particular form of capitalism became dominant known as near liberal capitalism. If you remember the movie Wall Street, and Gordon Gekko, Greed is Good, it was very much a mindset in which greed is good was in many ways the mantra of this era. It was an ideology that kind of really de-emphasized and devalued the role of community helping each other and caring for each other, and the human being, exactly.
- Noreena Hertz:** 30:09 Yeah, we were kind of reduced to homo economicus who is meant to be just really a kind of self-seeking, self-interested person, man, homo. Where we were reduced to that and where qualities such as competitiveness and value such as looking out for yourself were those that were valorized and rewarded. And as a society, we took these values on board. We actually see this even in pop song lyrics which you can see from the 1980s onwards become increasingly individualistic in turn with even collective nouns like we, us and our steadily supplanted by words like I, me and myself. Queen, We Are the Champions in the '70s and more recently, I am GOAT, Kanye West.
- Noreena Hertz:** 31:17 So we became more individualistic and began to see ourselves even more as competitors rather than collaborators, as hustlers rather than helpers, as takers rather than givers. And of course, a world of me first, self-interested first mindset was inevitably going to beget a world in which we felt more disconnected from each other, more atomized and more lonely. So I think that was a key reason why we've seen from the 1980s onwards, people feel increasingly more lonely. And in fact, there's empirical data that shows that countries that are more individualistic are more lonely. And as a world as a whole, we've become more individualistic. So loneliness is by no means today an exclusively Western phenomenon, and there are burgeoning loneliness crisis in India and South Africa and China too, but in lockstep really with how individualistic those societies have become as well.
- Noreena Hertz:** 32:34 But again, these are a couple of factors, our mindsets and technology, but there are more drivers. There are more drivers. Two, we just do less with each other

than we did in the past. And again, this is something which we've seen a steady increase in people doing less with each other than in the past over the last few decades. You're more likely to live on your own. You're less likely to eat lunch with others. You're less likely to be a member of a trade union. You're less likely to be a member of a parent teacher's association. You're less likely to go to church. So places, ways in the past, rituals for doing things with others have been eroded. The traditional spaces for doing things with others have seen reduced membership interaction over the past few decades. So, those are just a few of the kind of key reasons why this is the lonelier century.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 33:36 Have you seen the new Adam Curtis documentary, Can't Get You Out of My Head?
- Noreena Hertz:** 33:41 No, I haven't. Is it aligned to this?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 33:46 Well, I didn't see his Century of Self documentary that came out in 2015. I imagine he recycled some of those themes, but what struck me, it's a difficult documentary to sort of follow, to be honest. It's a six part, very long documentary. I think it aired on the BBC, but I've been watching it on YouTube. The parts in which he deals with the self are really interesting because I do think, and I mean, I think you agree with this just having read your book, but I do think that we've convinced ourselves somehow that the path to happiness is through the self. Not necessarily self-development, but feeding the self. And I think that that has created among other things a more narcissistic society, like you said, reflected in not only our lyrics, but if you go on social media, you find that people, and oftentimes I think they're totally unaware of it, are using me, mine, I, and consistently referencing themselves.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 34:49 What's interesting about Curtis's documentary is that it also plays with the, not necessarily explicitly but it comes across plays with themes of political instability around that type of society. Because in my view, this is where I'm driving at because I would like to know what you think about this, it seems to me that a stable society exists somewhere on a continuum. There's a Goldilocks zone of political stability. If you're too much of a collectivist society, at least in these industrial societies that require command control models in order to operate at scale, you end up having a deeply unstable system like in North Korea, for example.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 35:35 But if you have, on the other extreme, a highly individualistic society, I wonder if that also sort of tends towards anarchy and volatility and where you end up getting mobs of people forming and dissipating, just similarly to in physics if a system is running very hot, you have a lot of kinetic energy. I wonder if that then doesn't also create an opportunity for a demagogue, for example, to come into power who can easily sway huge masses of people who have no, let's say, organic relationship with each other and are much more easily co-opted. Does that make sense? Does that resonate?
- Noreena Hertz:** 36:20 Yeah, that really speaks to my research on the link between the rise of right-wing populism and loneliness. For sure, because what I found was that there are many people who feel disconnected from the state, but also disconnected from their fellow citizens who are craving connection and community actually, but

not finding it in a contemporary world in which they feel that they have been rendered invisible or forsaken, who believe that they will be heard and seen by particular politicians, right wing populist politicians on the whole who say that they will hear and see them. And also importantly delivering a community that they feel they've lost elsewhere.

- Noreena Hertz:** 37:22 The loneliness of these voters came out in two very different ways. One was literally many of them told me that before they had found community in right-wing populist movements, they had been lonely. They hadn't had friends. They had felt isolated, rusty. The railroad worker in East Tennessee told me about how he had been missing the brotherhood of the railroad after jobs had been lost there and unions diminished. Eric, the far right populist voting Parisian Baker told me about how he hadn't been able to find community and friends in Paris, in a city where everyone kind of walked by each other rushing go, go, go. And how he had found community in his far right weekly meetings where they would leaflet and then go out for coffee together.
- Noreena Hertz:** 38:19 So these voters partly looking for community and finding it in right-wing populist movements who have been very effective in delivering a theater of community wheeled in community like a weapon. Think about Trump rallies, the chanting and the branding and the kind of sense of almost religious communion that they provided. But also this group feeling lonely in the sense of feeling marginalized and forsaken and left behind, especially working class white men who in many ways were newly experiencing this state in recent years and in the wake of automation and post 2008 financial crisis. And right-wing populists speaking to these groups as well.
- Noreena Hertz:** 39:20 So yes, partly a consequence of increased sense of individualism within society. And people actually knew. Interestingly, Trump voters in 2016 were significantly more likely than Clinton voters in 2016 to say that they had no friends, that they had no acquaintances, that the only person they could rely on was themselves. So more likely to kind of be suffering this extreme kind of sense of breakdown of community and individualistic experience, but clearly suffering because then they were craving community and looking for that support which they weren't finding elsewhere, but also a group who had in economic terms being casualties of a particularly harsh form of capitalism that has reigned Supreme over recent years.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 40:19 In the book you cite both Hannah Arendt, but also Amy Butler. The quote that you pulled from her book really resonated with me because it dealt with the zeitgeist of the younger generation in Germany prior to the outbreak of World War II. And I wonder, I guess, one, how much time did you spend learning about, reading about or freshening up on the history of Germany prior to the outbreak of World War I, prior to the rise of Nazism rather, and are there parallels between that time and the present moment, particularly in this sense of nihilism around younger generations?
- Noreena Hertz:** 41:05 What I found in my research and in one of the... There were echos frighteningly with the rise of Nazi Germany to the extent that loneliness was an emotion that seemed to be playing a part in why young people especially perhaps were turning to the Nazi party. Anyway, loneliness again in two senses, loneliness in

that sense of feeling isolated from others and in the sense of feeling that you don't belong, and also loneliness in the sense of feeling that you have no place in the world, that you've been forsaken and forgotten. So those manifestations of loneliness, and it was actually the incredible thinker, Hannah Arendt, who in trying to figure out, after World War II, the causes of the rise of Nazi Germany. She wrote this very famous book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In that she identified loneliness as one of the key drivers.

- Noreena Hertz:** 42:32 And as I re-read her work and, yes, looked in archive and looked at testimonies of people in the past in Germany around the time of Hitler's rising, there were definite stories of people who clearly were saying that they felt lonely, disconnected, isolated, and were finding a sense of belonging and community in the Nazi party that they weren't finding elsewhere. And of course this is the extreme manifestation of this, but if we think about whether it's the folk who stormed the Capitol or the QAnon believers or conspiracies or in cells, I mean, loneliness is a recurring theme when you really start digging into those groups at the extremes. Of course, this isn't to say that everyone who's lonely is going to head in that direction. Of course that isn't what I'm saying. But if we look at these groups of people, whether it's right-wing populist voters or people at the further extremes, we do find that loneliness is often a common shared experience of them.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 44:06 I also, again, because I'm trying to find just how far this definition can stretch, but when the 2008 financial crisis happened, and listeners know that my degree was in economics, I had been blogging about the mortgage market prior to the crash. So the crash itself was not a surprise, maybe the extent of it or all the particulars, but what was for me was the reaction of the authorities, the bailouts, the way in which they were able to loot the public purse in a way to subsidize their private risks and socialize their risks and privatize the gains. And I became very disillusioned. I remember how dark that period felt for me. I mean, in my memory, I remember it as being dark, and I went through a series of conspiratorial rabbit holes. I was even watching David Icke video talking about lizards, people being lizards.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 45:02 I mean, I went, yeah, everywhere, every sort of conspiracy you can imagine. The reason that I did it, when I look back, and some of them were I think obviously not the lizard ones, but some of them were absolutely worth entertaining. But ultimately when I look back, I think it's because the world as it was turned out to be such a lie, or as I thought it was, turned out to be such a lie that I lost faith in anything and everything. There does seem to be a relationship between isolation and one's tendency to entertain or conjure up all sorts of what would otherwise be irrational, deemed irrational or unbelievable explanations for a world that feels like it's increasingly coming apart. Is there a relationship there that you've been able to observe or document?
- Noreena Hertz:** 45:55 Well, there is a relationship between feeling lonely and being more believing of conspiracy theories. I don't know how lonely and isolated you felt at that time, but maybe you felt lonely in this existential-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 46:14 I was watching hours and hours of Alex Jones videos. That's how lonely I was.

Noreena Hertz: 46:19 Yeah. And it's lonely also in that existential sense feeling like isolated that the way you were seeing the world wasn't the way others were seeing the world. So feeling lonely in that sense as well, disconnected from your government and the choices it was making. And there's also research that shows that, the research done with siblings who lived in the same neighborhood and the research has found that the sibling who was the lonelier of the two was more likely to perceive the world as a more hostile, threatening place than the less lonely sibling.

Noreena Hertz: 47:00 So there's definitely a relationship between how we feel and how we experience the world. And also of course, the choices we make, whether our emotions are shaped by our environment, but our emotions also shape our environment and our experience of our environments, and they shape on decisions not only on whether we're going to watch Alex Jones or David Dow but also who we're going to vote for. And of course whether we're going to buy GameStop as well. I mean, it's all-

Demetri Kofinas: 47:39 How familiar are you with that phenomenon, what's been going on? Because we haven't talked about this at all, about the distortions that we've been seeing in financial markets.

Noreena Hertz: 47:49 I mean, we've known for a long time and I've been very interested in behavioral finance for many years. My last book is actually kind of around the psychology of decision-making. But I think we've known for a long time that markets move on emotions and feelings, in the same way that we now recognize that people vote on feelings and emotions as well. We finally have recognized that as well.

Demetri Kofinas: 48:18 Specifically, well, I don't mean the behavioral dynamics of market prices, but rather the way in which this generation increasingly finds community online and how some of those communities spill into speculations, whether it's in GameStop or other story stocks, or in cryptocurrencies where I think we see this most prominently.

Noreena Hertz: 48:40 Yeah. And all the time people are spending on Reddit balls or wherever or groups, wherever they're getting their information, but also not just seeing these places as places to get information but as real communities and feeling part of the community. The craving for community and connection is so innate in us. And in a way are creatures of togetherness. We are hard wired to connect. If there are places and spaces and ways for us to do that in what we might think of as healthier ways, and if for example social media is kind of designed to hook you into their platforms, if less healthy ways and spaces to communicate are particularly alluring, people are craving community and are going to go and seek it out wherever it is to be found.

Noreena Hertz: 49:42 You talk about being dispirited after 2008 when you were seeing the government was making choices to follow a path of stereotypes and really cutting back on public services and welfare spending and kind of helping those who needed help the most in order to bail out the banks and kind of you talk about being disillusioned in that period. One of the things that was an outcome of this sort of post 2008 financial crisis mindset across the globe, not only in the US, was the real destruction of what we might think of as an infrastructure of

community, say funding in public parks, in public libraries, in community centers, in youth clubs, in daycares, in day centers for elderly people. All of these physical spaces where people could come together and be together and do things together.

- Noreena Hertz:** 50:50 So, massive defunding from 2008 onwards. Public libraries in the United States saw a 40% drop in federal funding. And that's part of the problem because if people don't have physical spaces to be together, well, of course they're going to feel more lonely. And of course, they're going to be seeking out community in all these other places and spaces. We're not going to find common ground unless there is physical ground where we can be together. So that's another legacy of the choices that governments made during that period that have a serious ripple effect when it comes to how itemized and fractured society has become and how appealing some of these less salubrious forms of community have become.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 51:48 Yeah. And I think also that speaks to, again, the connection between politics and markets. Neoliberal economic policies and ideologies in many ways tried to disconnect the two. But in fact, we find that there are tightly connected, not only because governments create the foundation for markets, the rules of the road in which they operate, but also because ultimately markets exist within that political framework. And so if you don't consider the stability of your country and your nation, you could end up having an event that will subsume markets. So in other words, for example, it isn't just about let's prioritize all the parks. I mean, public parks are important because if you have a democratic society, people need to be able to be in relationship with one another. There needs to be a level of societal resiliency that factors into politics as well. I think that comes up a lot for me when I read your book.
- Noreena Hertz:** 52:56 Absolutely. There was a time when economics and the economy and social justice were much more tightly coupled even under capitalism, even under free market capitalism. Even Adam Smith, very much the founding father of free market capitalism, alongside writing *The Wealth of Nations* of course wrote *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in which he talked a lot about the importance of community, empathy. The need for the state to step in when the market became too powerful to monitor the market. The need of the state to provide help support community. And yet what happened was that really from the '80s onwards, and then accelerated and exacerbated by the 2008 financial crisis, we just saw a kind of steady jettisoning of that side of his thinking of the kind of ethical, pro community, pro society side of the thinking, and just an overarching emphasis on freedom, free markets freedom from government interference, and an overarching emphasis on growth without recognizing that growth is ultimately predicated on their being on a society that is cohesive and feels connected to each other.
- Noreena Hertz:** 54:41 We went down a really erroneous path. And for me, the kind of seismic political shocks that we saw over the past decade with this rise of right-wing populism was in many ways an inevitable outcome of where society had evolved and where economics had taken us. And of course this isn't... I think it's important to be clear. This isn't an anticapitalist message. This is about saying that there always have been other forms of capitalism than the form of capitalism that

dominated from the 1980s. I mean, there always were other forms of capitalism, whether it was the more collectively minded capitalism of central Europe or Asian capitalism, which always kind of was very cognizant and aware and mindful of the need to nurture relationships. It's just that this particular form of capitalism has had very deleterious outcomes in many ways.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 55:57 Well, it's a form of market fundamentalism and it puts efficiency... everything gets sacrificed at the altar of efficiency. And one of those things is resiliency and stability. And I think we're seeing that in our politics. Noreen, I'm going to move the rest of our conversation into the overtime. I want to discuss both, well, we talked about some of the costs already, the political costs. I do want to talk about some of the physical and emotional costs of isolation in more detail because you've done a great job of quantifying some of those. I'd like for our listeners to hear that, because I think even in the case of the pandemic, that's a great example in which there are costs to how we've chosen to respond, and to lock downs and everything else. I want to explore some of those, and then I want to get into solutions, how you think we should go about trying to address this epidemic in a way, you could certainly describe it.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 56:52 For anyone who is new to the program, Hidden Forces is listener supported. We don't accept advertisers or commercial sponsors. The entire show is funded from top to bottom by listeners like you. If you want access to the second part of my conversation with Noreena, as well as the transcripts and rundowns to this episode and every other episode we've ever done, head over to hiddenforces.io to check out our episode library or subscribe directly through our Patreon page at patreon.com/hiddenforces. There's also a link in the summary page to this episode with instructions on how to connect the overtime feed to your phone so you can listen to these extra discussions just like you listen to the regular podcast. Noreena, stick around. We're going to move the rest of our conversation into the subscriber overtime.
- Noreena Hertz:** 57:39 Okay.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 57:41 Today's episode of Hidden Forces was recorded in New York City. 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 at patreon.com/hiddenforces. 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 @HiddenForcesPod, or send me an email. As always, thanks for listening. We'll see you next week.