

BOOK COVER COURTESY OF BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING

Johann Hari is the author of "Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression – and the Unexpected Solutions."

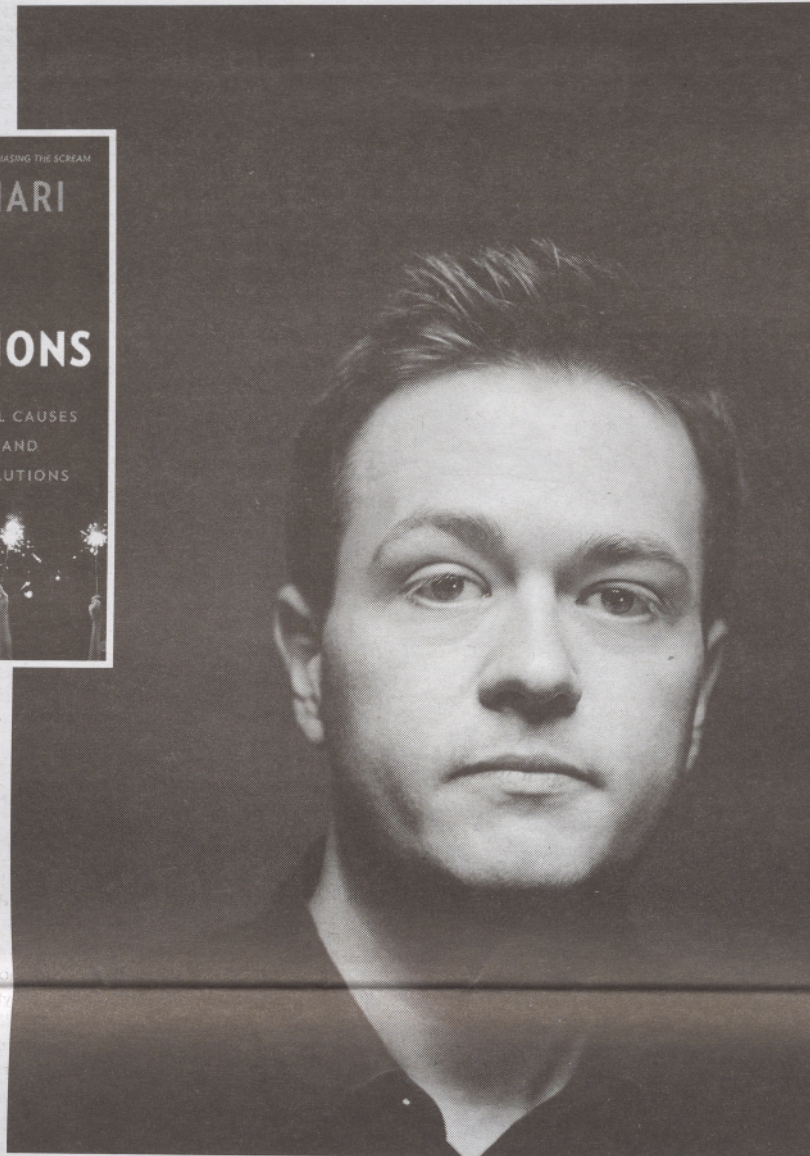


PHOTO BY SIMON EMMETT

The real reason we're sad and anxious and what to do about it

The root of depression is environmental, not biological, author Johann Hari explains

BY EMILY GREEN
SENIOR STAFF REPORTER

The way we've been taught to think about depression and anxiety is all wrong, says Johann Hari.

In his new book, the London-based journalist and New York Times best-selling author explains that depression is not actually the result of malfunctioning brain chemistry – it's a response to the way we're living our lives.

Hari spent three years traveling the world, speaking to scientists and doctors who have made ground-breaking discoveries around depression and anxiety – and who have found innovative and surprising ways to treat it.

This research and Hari's personal experiences with his own depression have culminated in his new book, "Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression – and the Unexpected Solutions."

In the same way Hari's previous book, "Chasing the Scream," helped shift the conversation around drug treatment and addiction, "Lost Connections" seeks to radically reframe the way we approach depression and anxiety.

Bloomsbury Publishing is releasing the book in the U.S. on Jan. 21, and it's already received rave reviews from progressive icons

such as Naomi Klein, Bill Maher and Arianna Huffington. According to Elton John, it's a book that "will change your life."

Hari recently spoke with Street Roots from his home in London. He shared what he's learned about depression and discussed ways we can all strive to live happier lives. We began our interview by discussing why he began researching depression in the first place.

Johann Hari: I really wrote this book because there were these two mysteries that were haunting me. One was: Why was I still depressed?

When I was a teenager, I went to my doctor, and I explained I had this feeling like pain was kind of leaking out of me, and I couldn't control it. My doctor told me a story, which is, "There is a chemical called serotonin that some people are lacking in their brains, that makes them feel terrible. You're clearly one of these people. We'll give you these drugs and it will make you feel good again."

I took this drug Paxil for 13 years and I remained depressed. I had a boost when I started taking them, and then a few months later I started to feel really bad again, so I went back to the doctor and they said well, you haven't been given a high enough dose. I

was given another dose, I felt a bit better for a few months, and the feeling came back. I was basically in that pattern until I was taking the maximum allowable dose. So why was I still depressed when I was doing everything I was told to do?

The second thing was: Why were there so many other people like me?

There's been this explosion of depression and anxiety in the United States and across the Western world. Today, 1 in 5 Americans is taking a psychiatric drug, 1 in 11 Americans is taking an antidepressant, and we're more depressed than we've ever been. And we see this manifesting in all sorts of ways.

I wanted to understand this, so I ended up going on this big long journey. I went 40,000 miles meeting the best scientists in the world who've looked into this. I think the main thing I learned is it's not so much a lesson about antidepressants, as it's a lesson about depression and anxiety themselves.

I thought I was weird for still being depressed when I was taking antidepressants, but in fact I discovered I was completely normal – between 65 and 80 percent of people taking antidepressants are still depressed.

See DEPRESSION, page 5