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John Moe: The internet, the online world, cyberspace—if you'll pardon the archaic terminology—can be a tricky place. Oh, it has its benefits. For instance, convenient connections to other people, like old friends, new friends, communities of all types. That can be very nice, beneficial even. But extending yourself out to the democratized online universe has huge honking downsides too. There are scammers, trolls, the comment section—which you should never read but sometimes do. It can be dicey when you put yourself out there. So, if you want the good stuff, the ugly stuff comes along with it as well. And the more out there you are, the more problematic your digital life and your complete life can become.

It's a very vulnerable situation. And for some people there are additional vulnerabilities making everything yet more treacherous. If you deal with depression, for instance, the negativity that can emerge with the world at your fingertips can be a lot. Or if you're part of a group that routinely gets discriminated against and harassed. I mean, you're safe here, listening to this show. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: My guest this week is Lindy West. Lindy is a very successful writer based in the Pacific Northwest. She's been a *New York Times* opinion columnist. She's the author of the book *Shrill*, which was turned into a TV series on Hulu, starring Aidy Bryant. Cohost of the podcast *Text Me Back*. Lindy West kind of first became famous in 2011 with an essay in *The Stranger*, an alt weekly in Seattle, entitled “Hello, I Am Fat”, which talked about the ways in which she sees herself and how she is seen and treated in the rest of society.

Here's a rundown of what Lindy has going on. She's a writer, so her work is necessarily online and widely distributed. She's a woman. She has strong opinions. And she's fat, a term she prefers to the alternatives. And these are all things that make her even more of a target for people wanting to tear her down. Lindy is also part of a three-person polyamorous relationship, a fact she announced a couple years ago, that has led to a lot more criticism—often of the nasty variety. On top of all this, Lindy West is a person with depression and ADHD, a person who has struggled with her mental health. And here's why I wanted to talk to her.

One, she's a great writer and hilarious. Two, a whole lot of people need to navigate a presence in the modern digital world, which is made more complicated when you have vulnerabilities. Lindy has more vulnerabilities than most. And I think there are lessons that can be learned from someone who has been in a situation like that.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Lindy West, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Lindy West: Thank you for having me! Hello.

John Moe: Where are we finding you today?

Lindy West: So, I live in the forest (*laughs*) about two hours west of Seattle, sort of Hood Canal, Olympic Peninsula region.

John Moe: Okay. Why do you live way out there? That's pretty rural and woody.

Lindy West: It is. It's extremely rural. We're not even in a town. It's not like we're like in Port Townsend. We are—I mean, Port Townsend is the closest metropolis, at I think 12,000 people or something. We moved out here in October, me and—I have two partners, a husband and a wife, basically. And we moved out here in October, because our rent in Seattle to live in a very cute but very small house in White Center, you know, was \$3,600 a month. And it was like—and I grew up in Seattle, and I'm like, “I don't—I'm offended.”

(They laugh.)

You know? And I'm not the kind of woman who is responsible with money. You know, we don't own a home. We're just renting for the foreseeable. And so, I was like, “What am I—?” You know, I'm a pretty successful person. And I was spending all my time making rent to live in a tiny house in my hometown. And I was like I'm mad, and also I can't live like this anymore. And so, essentially we got priced out of Seattle. All three of us are artists. And it, you know, feels like a little bit of an artistic brain drain, you know. Not like the three of us constitute a brain drain, but like so many people I know have moved away from the city. People are moving to Tacoma. People are moving to Everett.

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Anyway. I feel like it's a part of that. And then also, thanks to tremendous privilege, my mother owns this log cabin out in the woods that my parents bought when I was, you know, one year old. So, early '80s. And we were coming out here to do maintenance a lot. It requires a ton of upkeep. It's a really old house made of logs. And so—she's always stressed about how there's not enough money, and there's not enough time. And so, it was kind of a win. I was like, “What if we rent the cabin from you, and then we're your caretakers. And then we get to live in a big, beautiful house in the most beautiful place in the world for, you know, a fraction of what we were paying in Seattle?” So, now I live here.

John Moe: That's a bargain.

Lindy West: Yeah. And I don't do any of the stuff that the city is for anymore anyway. I don't go to bars. I don't go to clubs. And I can go into town. It's only two hours—hour and a half if you drive right on the ferry. And you know, I can see my friends. And it's working so far.

John Moe: And then get back to the forest.

Lindy West: Yeah, I like the forest!

John Moe: (*Chuckles.*) Yeah, I left Seattle 16 years ago, I think, because we had baby number three on the way, and we were living in a pretty small house in West Seattle. And I thought this isn't going to get any easier in the foreseeable future. Let's flee.

Lindy West: Yeah! And you went to the beautiful Midwest, which I love.

John Moe: Yes, it's a wonderful place. And how are you doing today?

Lindy West: I'm doing okay. I woke up with a headache, which is not normal for me. And so, then I was a little bit panicked. Like, am I dying? Or do I have covid? Or I don't know. Our adult daughters are here visiting. They're 20 and 22. So, I was like did they bring me covid? It was just kind of a frazzled morning. You know, I'm out of practice like finding breakfast for children, even though they're adults. I'm like, okay, well, there's Costco croissants in the freezer! And I'm racing around and I'm—and then I had to wake them up, because I had to come up here. They were sleeping up here where I do my podcasting. So, I'm a little bit frazzled.

Oh, but also, We finished a puzzle this morning, and there were five pieces missing. So, that was—you know, I'm just a little off kilter, I have to say.

John Moe: Okay. (*Chuckles.*) You know, I'm familiar with your work. I'm a fan of your work. I've read a lot of and watched a lot of interviews of you. And here's the thing about Lindy West that intrigues me is that—I mean, there are many things that intrigue me. Here's a crystallization of one of the things that intrigues me is that you live a semi-public life. You control what it is you want to put out into the world—like we all do, and we all must—but you are a recognized name. You write about yourself. You write about your experiences. And you are thus subject to the cruelties and risk and punishment of vulnerability that is inherent to being a person in 2024.

You are also a person who has dealt with depression. You are no stranger to mental health issues. Is it—how much of your time is spent formulating a way to navigate all these potential pitfalls in your life?

Lindy West: I feel like I don't know how to separate living life and navigating life. You know what I mean? Like my life is dealing with my life. (*Laughs.*) If that makes any sense. I would say that in my 40s—I'm 42—I am just now starting to understand my brain and understand—and find ways of being in charge of rather than at the mercy of my bad brain, my faulty wiring. (*Chuckles.*) I have largely removed myself from contexts in which the cruelties of the internet—the broader internet—can reach me. I quit Twitter in 2017. For good. I deleted my account. Like, I can't go back. You know, I'm—Instagram doesn't really lend itself to trolling in a way that is kind of them. My face—you know, I really removed myself, which has probably been detrimental to my career.

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You know, I try not to think about it too much. It's like when I was really dealing with relentless, very scary trolling—from which I don't think I have recovered emotionally—I

used to be really defiant about it. And I would say, you know, “They're trying to silence me. I'm not going to be silenced. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” And come to find out, I think they did silence me a little bit. You know, I really have retreated, and I really don't engage publicly anymore in the same way. Not that there's inherent value in arguing on Twitter, but I think I, at a certain point, stopped writing op eds. You know, I did get chased out of the public sphere a little bit. Because you know, especially when I was writing a weekly column for the *New York Times* or for *The Guardian*—I have since been diagnosed with ADHD. Those were tremendous feats for me to accomplish. Every single—I was pulling an all-nighter every week.

It's weird to say this, because this has been my whole career. So, it's not like it was such a hardship to do, because that's—obviously, I've been writing articles for, you know, the first 10 years of my career. I just worked at newspapers and blogs. So, it's not like woe is me. But it was this cycle where I would really grind myself down into nothing with a ton of anxiety. You know, it felt like a big stage, high stakes, am I getting this right? I would stay up all night. I would hit send at 7AM. I would force myself to stay awake to get edits sort of by noon, and then I would pass out. And then I would wake up, and the article would have gone up, and then I would have just a wall of trolling, people making fun of me. People, you know, from right and left. There was always like this sort of—obviously, the right wing was terrible, but then there was this sort of leftist bro culture that really thought I was absurd. And that was really exhausting to—I don't know, it just—at a certain point, it wasn't worth it to me.

And also, I was like do I have anything else to say? What more can you say about Donald Trump at a certain point? I was like I gotta go. But I think... that said, yes, I was driven out a little bit just in the interest of protecting myself. But that's also not what I wanted to do. So, in this sort of strange backdoor way, I got burned out on writing about politics and feminism and, you know, being fat or whatever. And I have—all these things that generated so much torment for me. And I found my way back around to creating things that make me happy. And that's stuff like I write a newsletter, called *Butt News*, where I rewatch movies from the '90s and make fun of them. Or I have this podcast where my best friend and I talk about, oh, they discovered a new kind of hedgehog. Or we had our friend from high school on to answer our questions about the *Lord of the Rings* legendarium. You know what I mean? (*Laughs.*)

Like, I found my way sort of back to myself through this gauntlet of torture. And it's not like I regret any of that work, at all. And I do think that I wrote some things that mattered and that I'm proud of. But it's actually been an interesting process of finding a place where I can both do my work and feel safe and have some confidence that my actual self—which is not a pundit, you know; my actual self is not a serious film critic; my actual self is not even necessarily a vulnerable memoirist. Well, part of my actual self is that. My actual self is like a weird freak who loves snakes. You know? And there's—and I found my way back to a place where I believe that there's value in that. And it's being proven to me, because people are subscribing, and they like it. (*Laughs.*) So, anyway, that long story short—I get almost no troll comments anymore, because my opinions about snakes are uncontroversial.

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John Moe: So, the answer to how you protect yourself is that you shut some things down and ran off to the forest to some extent?

Lindy West: Kind of, yeah! Literally and figuratively. I mean, I feel like I've overcorrected in that answer, because I did just finish writing my fourth book, which is definitely my most vulnerable and most personal. But the thing that really gets you when you're getting trolled is the element of truth in it, I think. At least for me. And so, as long as I'm confident that what I wrote is true and is my best that I could do, I'm not so scared of trolls.

You know, there was something really scary about writing about politics on a big platform where it's like I don't know! I don't know! It's just my—like, I was essentially writing sort of, “This is my instinct. This is my perspective. I'm not an expert.” And it's scary to write about something high stakes from a layman's perspective. But writing about myself—but when I'm writing about myself, the only task is to move further and further into the truth, and find ways to be more and more honest, and find the bravery to be more and more honest, and not make myself into an idealized version of myself and a sort of tortured brave hero, which I think I do a little bit of in *Shrill*, the book.

And in this book, I'm a lot more honest about my flaws and my failures. And it just feels less—I just don't care. I'm finally at a point where I'm not writing for the audience. And I think I always have been writing for the audience up until now. And on all of these projects, I'm not doing that anymore. And I don't know if that just comes with age or if it comes with experience and, uh, mental collapse. (*Laughs.*) But, yeah, you know, I still get—I do get crazy comments still. Every once in a while, they find their way through. I got one of the craziest comments of my life just the other day on a newsletter post about my podcast Patreon. A woman wrote the most intrusive, bizarre thing. I almost want to read it to you.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: And she will read that when our program continues.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back talking with Lindy West. She brought up a message that she received that kind of shocked her. It stood out from a lot of other not-so-nice comments she's been getting for years. I'll let her set this up.

Lindy West: A lot of my new book that I just turned in the first draft of, which is called *Adult Braces*—a lot of it is actually about this exact thing, which is the feeling of being owned by the public and how that erases your sense of self, at least for me. Because I've never been a forceful, confident, self-assured person. I've always been a very shy, soft person. And it's really easy—I'm really susceptible to other people telling me who I am, at least when I was younger. And so, I'm just finally, now that I'm really working on my mental health in my late 30s and now early 40s—I feel like I've only just now figured out the beginnings of who I am kind of objectively and learning how to stay in that place and write from that place.

So, that's really exciting. That's a ton of what this book is about. And it makes it even more jarring now, I guess, when I get these comments. And I used to get comments like this all the time. I mean, that's what it's like being a fat person who has any kind of public presence is you just have people worming their fingers into your life all the time, telling you about your life, telling you what you eat. You know, it's so corrosive, at least to someone like me, who is

a soft baby! (*Laughs.*) Like, it was not good. It's not good for me. And so, I still get those across the board because— And we do this to—I don't consider myself a celebrity, but we do this to celebrities. We turn them into ideas and toys.

John Moe: Yeah. And then we attack those toys.

Lindy West: Yeah. And it's so bizarre to be even a tiny bit on the inside of that and have, you know, some understanding. I have a lot of sympathy for super famous people. I assume—I hope that none of them ever look at the internet. But okay. So, I wrote a newsletter on my Substack, which is called *Butt News*. This is a joke publication, first of all. And what I do is recap movies from the '80s and '90s.

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Or—and some more modern ones! But you know, it's a ridiculous place. (*Laughs.*) It's... I wrote a post that was like, “Hey, please support my podcast Patreon, so that—” And it was a little bit vulnerable. I was talking about some of the stuff I've just been saying to you, where I found my way to this very honest place where I'm just getting to do what I actually care about and be myself, blah, blah, blah.

Now, tiny bit of backstory. When I—(*chuckles*) god, this is so embarrassing to even talk about. When I went public with my non-monogamous three-person marriage, which is not as salacious as it sounds; it's truly just three people live in a house, they might kiss, instead of two people live in a house, they might kiss. It's like very wholesome and boring. And we just like do the dishes and watch *Sopranos*. But a lot of people were really mad about it. Which is so weird. Because I mean, I understand that people are very threatened by this idea, because I think everyone just immediately thinks, “Oh, my spouse is going to leave me or try to make me have another sister wife or whatever.” People just project all of their anxieties onto it.

And I get that, because I used to have some of those feelings, and I don't anymore. And I feel very liberated by that freedom. But I understand. But the backlash was so bizarre and inappropriate. And it was all these people who were claiming to be my fans and defenders being like, “It's obvious that he doesn't love the fat one. He only loves the skinny one.” (*Laughs.*)

(*John “ooh”s in sympathy.*)

It's, “Oh, I feel so bad for the ugly fat woman who—” (*Laughing.*) Like, okay, you guys—

John Moe: These are people subscribing to your newsletter?

Lindy West: Well, those are people on Instagram. So, the newsletter audience is a little bit more whittled down. And yet it's not—we've all been living together for like three years, and yet I get this comment just a few days ago from a woman who put her full name on it! She said, in response to my podcast Patreon—she said, “You still never had a child. You sacrificed it for a man who did procreate, but you didn't. He got everything.”

(Laughs.) It's like, ma'am, are you okay? I know that this is a mental health podcast, and I should not Indulge in casual ableism. But you need—

John Moe: What's wrong?

Lindy West: What's wrong? You need to get treated for your personality disorder. Like, that is—first of all, thanks for saying that my step-kids are not my real kids. Like, 'cause the subtext of that comment is that my husband has like taken advantage of me. And this is—because this is the narrative that these people have that I couldn't possibly be happy. I couldn't possibly be choosing the situation. This is my husband having a field day with whatever. And I have sacrificed my life to stay with him, even though I'm being disrespected by this evil woman in my home. Who, by the way, I am also in a relationship with! But whatever. I don't need to defend it.

But it's like, can you imagine writing that comment? It's like, first of all, you don't—I haven't written anything about my fertility journey. Like, she doesn't know—maybe I've had nine miscarriages! She doesn't know! What a crazy thing to say! I do have children. I've raised them since they were little. They're my daughters. So, that's gross to say that they're not my real children. So, like... it does—I laugh about it, but it does have an impact just to be a person that strangers think they can say such things to, you know? What?!

John Moe: Well, how far back do you go with depression?

Lindy West: Oh, great question! Probably always, except I didn't know (laughs) until, uh... really recently probably. I don't think I really identified as a person who has depression until probably the last five years or so. Yeah, I just always thought that I was lazy and incompetent.

John Moe: Because you couldn't get stuff done?

Lindy West: Yeah, because I couldn't get stuff done, because I would be totally incapable of getting stuff done for long stretches of time.

John Moe: Do you understand that to be depression, or do you understand it to be ADHD at this point?

Lindy West: Well, that's a great question. And that's something my therapist and I have been talking about. Is some part of my extreme sleepiness (laughs) just ADHD?

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There are definitely—the depression is definitely real, because there are stretches that are not just inability to get things done, but are also deep despair. So, sometimes I will have despair for months. But I guess I always just told myself that was situational. Like, I am rationally reacting to some situation in my life. And it didn't occur to me—you know, it all kind of happened backwards. Like, I got put on antidepressants, because I thought that I had PMDD, which is like mega PMS. I mean, that's a flippant way to describe it. It's truly debilitating.

And so, my doctor was like, “I’m going to put you on Zoloft and see if that helps.” And I don’t know if this was a cry for help or something. (*Chuckling.*) You know, if I didn’t know how to say, “I think I might, you know, have some mental health problems.” And as far as I could get was like, “I have really gnarly PMS, and I have a huge fight with my husband once a month. And I—like, for like a week before and a week after my period, I can’t function.”

And like, all of that’s true. And I probably do also have that. But when I went to the doctor, she put me on Zoloft, and it was the most profound light switch. Like, the first pill I took, my intrusive thoughts were gone. I had this—what I realized later was this mean voice talking to me in my head all the time that I thought was just me. I thought it was my rational inner monologue. And then I popped one Zoloft, it’s gone! There’s just silence in my head. And I was like, oh no! Whatever this pill is for, I have it! (*Laughs.*) You know? And it was so transformational. But that wasn’t until 2021, I think, that I started taking Zoloft. So, I was really just floundering until then. From 1982 until 2021, I was just at sea. And then, it’s been an amazing, accelerating journey since then.

John Moe: You were dealing with undiagnosed depression, undiagnosed ADHD, intrusive thoughts, horrible negative self-monologue, all the way through *Shrill* and *The New York Times* and all these things? That’s pretty high wire.

Lindy West: I know. And then I’m like, damn, like where would I be? (*Laughs.*) You know, it’s so—it’s honestly kind of hard to think about. It’s like (*sighs*) who would I be if I had been operating at capacity instead of—or I mean, at my maximum capacity instead of a deeply disordered state. But, uh, that’s fine. What can you do? I have it now, and it’s different. You know, this last book, I wrote it in what I would call a normal way. I went up to my office every day, and I sat down, and I wrote my book. What?! Let me tell ya, all those other books—that’s not how I did ‘em!

John Moe: Yeah, how did you write other books? How did you write those books?

Lindy West: I wrote those books, you know, chaotically. You know, as close to the deadline as I could get, lying down on the couch with my laptop on my face, crying, and like eating red vines to stay awake. You know, like I don’t know. I had definitely one breakdown per book where I had to sob to my husband and be like, “I can’t do it. It’s not happening. It’s not—” I mean, *Shrill*, especially. I just was like—I was like, “I don’t know how I’m going to do this. I can’t do this.”

And on this book, for the first time, I went into it feeling like I do know how to do this. (*Laughs.*) And then I just sat down, and I did it. I don’t know. I mean, it still took me—it took me like three years, but. (*Laughs.*)

John Moe: Yeah, well, books take a long time. Is it a credit to the medication, or have you been in therapy as well? ‘Cause it sounds like you’re making some breakthroughs here.

Lindy West: I think it’s both. Yeah. So much has happened, you know? I started going to therapy in 2019, and I had gone to therapy a couple of times, you know, for just a couple sessions with various people in the years before that. But I never really understood—you know, at that time I identified as a person who didn’t have mental health problems. (*Laughs.*)

And so, I was always like what am I doing here? Like, I remember I went to one woman, and I don't even know why I went. I think I was just—

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I mean, obviously, on some level I knew something was wrong, but then I got there, and I was like, “I don't know, I guess I'm afraid my parents will die?” (*Laughs.*) I don't know.

John Moe: Trying to come up with some bit to try out for the therapist.

Lindy West: Yeah, and I'm sure at that time I didn't want to touch anything that was actually wrong, like—I don't know—I'm lonely and I hate my body or whatever. But in 2019—and to the troll's credit, I started going to therapy in 2019, because my husband and I were making this change in our marriage that I had been—that was always sort of part of the deal, but I wasn't—I just wasn't in a place to do it, you know? And I was—because my confidence was so low, you know? And I was very much—we were in this very kind of unhealthy, codependent place, and I didn't feel lovable. And you know, whatever. I had all the usual scary feelings about it. And so, I started going to therapy. He started going to therapy. We started going to couples' therapy.

So, I had a lot of breakthroughs very fast. And it was really, really hard and really fun. (*Chuckles.*) Like, there's something about therapy that's kind of like a video game, where it's like, you know, “Oh, on to the next level! What else is in there? I don't know! Who's the next boss that I'm going to fight?” It's fun to uncover the—I don't know, the code that I didn't know was there. And so, I had a couple beautiful years with my perfect therapist, Judith, who I miss. Yeah. So, my husband and I, we did all this work. And then we ended up in this whatever you want to call it. There's no non-embarrassing word. I guess people would say throuple.

John Moe: throuple. Yeah. I was going to offer that.

Lindy West: I avoid it. But whatever. I guess I should—maybe that's just my internalized shame talking. We wound up in this throuple. It's the greatest thing that's ever happened to me. I don't know why everyone doesn't do this. But you don't have to! You don't have to. But it's amazing. Can you imagine? There's just like an extra person to do everything? To help? Like, three—whatever. You get to have alone time. You get to have—like, sometimes you come downstairs and just someone else did the dishes while you were asleep. Like, oh my god! Anyway.

John Moe: (*Chuckles.*) That could work in couples also, though. The other person—the other single person can do dishes.

Lindy West: It's true! But I'm just saying, like there's an—I'm not a mathematician, but there's some extra percentage of a chance that it's going to happen now! You know, the odds have increased.

John Moe: One extra person, yeah.

Lindy West: Yes! It's incredible. So, anyway. And also, I love her.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back in just a moment with more from Lindy West.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back again with Lindy West, talking about cohabitating with two partners and talking about Lindy's therapy journey.

Lindy West: Then I stopped seeing Judith, because I was doing pretty good. And I was on Zoloft. I was feeling pretty smooth. I went to my doctor, and I was like I think I might have ADHD. Something's wrong with my brain. I had my passport seized by the government, because I can't pay my taxes. Not I can't pay them, but I can't do them. I can't even get the documents to my accountant. I can't do it. I can't do it.

John Moe: You can't do the functional part of it.

Lindy West: I can't do it! So, then I tried to renew my passport, and they didn't give it back to me. Is that normal?

And then, I had a kind of traumatic experience getting evaluated for ADHD, where this woman—you know, I had three half-hour telehealth sessions with this woman, and she insisted that part of the diagnosis was that she had to call my mom. And I was like, "I'm 40."

And she was like, "Well, it's a childhood illness. So, I need to find out if you were like hyper as a kid."

And I was like, "Well, I wasn't."

Anyway, and then she did call my mom. Who knows what my mom said, but probably like, "Well, Lindy just didn't want to clean her room or do her homework or whatever. She's a lazy-bones. I don't know."

And then the woman was like, "I don't think you have it." And then she said that she gets a lot of—she said I'm too successful to have it, and that she gets a lot of professionals essentially pill seeking to try to maximize their potential at work. And I was like—

John Moe: Doctor shopping.

Lindy West: Yeah, and I was like I can't leave the country! (*Laughs.*) Like, do you understand? My car—

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I had to throw away my car, because I couldn't get the oil changed. And then the engine seized. Do you understand? I had to throw a car in the garbage. Like, please help me! (*Laughing.*) I'm not—I'm already really successful. Anyway. So, then I was like, okay, well, I guess I am just a lazy slob, just like I always thought, you know. And now I'm a pill hunting drug addict as well. And so, then I went—you know, some time passed. I went to the doctor again, and I was like, "Hello, I think that I have a weird relationship with food that I'm realizing."

Because that was another thing. Being a public figure who talks about being fat, I didn't get to develop my own relationship with food. I had to be in this position of saying—and this is shaped by the trolls as well. I had to constantly be on the defensive and be publicly saying, "No, no, no, no, no. I'm just like this. This is just my body. My relationship with food is the same as everyone else's." Because that was this corner that I got backed into, when you're trying to defend your humanity. I didn't have room for any nuance. And so, through this whole journey, I started to think, you know, I feel like I'm relying on food emotionally in a way that doesn't feel right. I'm not enjoying food anymore. I feel fixated on it in a way that is... disordered. You know, I didn't have words for it yet.

But I went to the doctor, and I was like, "Can I see a nutritionist or something?" And then she was like—tried to put me on Ozempic. And I was like, yes, the famous, cure for an eating disorder. And then finally, I got her to give me a list of nutritionists. There was only one on the list that, you know, expressed any like experience with not—there was only one person on the list who it seemed wasn't coming from a weight loss perspective. I chose her.

In my first session, basically, she was like, "Yeah, you have an eating disorder. And by the way, have you been evaluated for ADHD? Because you have that." (*Laughs.*)

John Moe: Oh, okay.

Lindy West: And I was like what!? And she's a behavioral health specialist. And so, then she became my therapist, but I still consider Judith my therapist, emeritus. But now I have this new therapist where we're working on disordered eating, ADHD. We're doing EMDR. I'm realizing that there's a lot of tapes running in my head from a really long time ago.

John Moe: Traumas?

Lindy West: Traumas, I guess you would call them. But you know, it's interesting what can be a trauma. Like, the stuff that we're talking about in EMDR is so... small.

John Moe: Trauma can be sneaky, though. It's not all car wrecks and plane crashes.

Lindy West: Exactly. It's like, oh, I remember, you know, a look someone gave me when I was having a milkshake in seventh grade after basketball practice, and then we're talking about that for like three hours. (*Laughs.*)

John Moe: They're moving a finger back and forth.

Lindy West: Exactly. Anyway, finally, it wasn't until probably six months ago that—then I got a psychiatrist, and now I am on Adderall. Which has been, you know, really incredible. But I wouldn't say—definitely transformative, but not on its own. You know, I feel like there's this impulse to underplay the significance of medication. And I don't want to do that. It definitely is really powerful and has helped me tremendously. And I don't know the ratio of, you know, what's done the most work, what's done the bulk of the work. And maybe it doesn't matter. But some combination of Zoloft, Adderall, two therapists, my nutritionist, and my psychiatrist has—and myself, you know? And things that I always—

John Moe: It's put you in a good place.

Lindy West: Has put me in a good place, has made me relatively functional in a way that I have never been in my life.

John Moe: When you get hit with the troll comments, wherever they may be, what percentage of them are about your size?

Lindy West: It just depends on the venue, I guess. (*Laughs.*)

John Moe: Well, it just seems like it's such an easy route for garbage-talking idiots to take. To take this simplest, you know, most cliched route to take. And it's interesting to me because, you know, reading your work—

[00:40:00]

You've all always struck me as, okay, I got this part nailed down. You know? Like, come from me on this issue; I'm ready for you. You're not going to get me on this. Maybe you get me on something else, but you're not going to get me on this.

But it sounds like, you know, that might be a misapprehension on my part.

Lindy West: No, I think you're right. It's just everything's more complicated than it seems, you know? It's like I have done more work on this than most people. And it's not that I read a hateful comment—and actually, to answer your last question, it's probably 90%. You know, it is the easiest thing. So, even when people are coming after me for something else, that's what they bring up, you know? Even if they're mad about my opinion—you know, my political opinion—they're still like, you know, “Why does this hog think she gets to talk or whatever? Oink, oink.”

But it doesn't get to me in an acute, sort of direct way. It's more like, cumulatively, it starts to feel like an injustice, where I'm like, “Why do I have to spend my life being subjected to this all the time for my whole career?” You know? I'm so—and I'm very aware that I am not taken seriously in a certain way, because of my body. And because of the fact that I dare to talk about my body and claim some kind of, you know, value—whether I personally believe in that value or not. That's a private matter for me to deal with internally. I know that objectively, in the world, I have as much value as anyone else. It's sort of like I feel it and I don't. I'm immune to it and I'm not. I'm definitely I am weary. I am sorrowful.

You know, I'm really—I think that like my higher self has a lot of sympathy for my lower self. (*Laughs.*) You know what I mean? Like I—but on the other hand, I'm so accustomed to getting these comments, it doesn't really land anymore in the same way. It's more symbolic of a sickness that affects my life and affects all fat people's lives in a way that is incredibly tragic and unjust. And so that bothers me. And then just personally, I have my own journey, which is figuring out how to be myself and be a symbol that means something to other people. And figuring out how to balance that, how to address my issues with food and with my body and not betray people who find meaning in my story.

And not give—well, this is the part that I'm really learning to let go of. I used to really worry about giving ammunition to trolls. And I don't worry about that anymore. I don't care. I have to live my life for myself. So, I don't care. I don't care anymore if a troll finds out that I've been diagnosed with binge eating disorder. Whereas before it would be like that's what they've always been saying. They'd be like, “See?” Like, I don't care. First of all, it's not what you think it looks like. You know, it's not a cartoon of me eating 40 cheeseburgers a day. It's like me sitting frozen in the car, feeling emotionally unsafe, because I don't know what I'm going to eat next. And what if I never eat anything that tastes good ever again? You know, like, I mean, it's like my brain is so much more scrambled than you think. It's not just like, you know, “Big mama hungry,” or whatever they think is going on.

John Moe: I hadn't thought of this before, that there are trolls out there, but there are also people probably—I don't know, worshipping you—but to whom you are a hero. And that's a different kind of online pressure that you have to face. And I mean, I think we all—in 2024, if you're anywhere near social media, if you walk by a computer that has Facebook open on one of its tabs, you have a brand. And that's why I keep kind of coming back to this, because your brand is bigger and more widely known than most people's.

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And so, you know, dealing with managing that image and managing the hate and the love is something that is kind of incumbent upon you, is presented to you as a challenge. And is managing the love, is managing that admiration and that hero status, as difficult—or is it similar to managing the trolls?

Lindy West: It's not as difficult. And of course, it can be very healing and nutritious. (*Laughs.*) So, I couldn't say that it's as hard or even really structurally similar. But it is similar in that it's just a different segment of people who have their own idea of who you are. And it's really hard for me not to play to the gallery, like I said, and try to be the person that they want me to be.

So, for instance, when I started treating my depression—you know, just a couple of years ago during covid when there was nothing to do. All my work dried up. Because previously I was flying around doing speaking engagements. And you know, I didn't have anything to do. And my husband and I were out here for the first six or eight months of covid just living in the woods. And I was in therapy constantly, like twice a week, plus couples therapy. I wasn't on Zoloft yet. But, oh, I wish I had been. That would have been—oof! Zoloft is like a party drug, as far as I'm concerned. And I lost some weight, because I was just—

John Moe: A note to listeners, Zoloft is not a party drug.

Lindy West: (*Laughing.*) It's not! It's not. I was just out here in the woods. I was, you know, gardening and walking and cooking and emerging from depression and really living—despite the horrors of the world, really living this sort of joyful life that I hadn't had for years and years and years. And I think as a result of that, of coming out of a really, really debilitating years-long depression that I only recognize now after the fact, during which I had gained a lot of weight. And I also had an injury that that really affected my mobility, and I had finally gotten that—I got orthotics, and I could like walk again. 'Cause I had this ankle problem, blah, blah, blah. Who cares? All of a sudden I was able to move, and I was happy. Long story short, some of this weight that I had gained during my years of depression came off, and I was getting smaller, which has never happened to me before in my life.

And there were people on the internet who noticed. And of course, I got comments that were like, “Oh, you look great.” You know. “Congratulations!” Which was gross. And that didn't feel good, but I would say equally unpleasant were the comments that were like, “Wow, another fat positive body shrinking,” you know, as though I was betraying them in some way. When what was happening on my end—and I wasn't talking about this; I wasn't, you know, sharing this—but I had found some reprieve from despair. And I was just starting to live a little bit more. I was starting to live my life, and I was starting to come out of the dark, and I was really feeling hopeful for the first time in a long time. And I was feeling—I was feeling alive! And people just assumed that I was like dieting, or I'd gotten bariatric surgery, or I was trying to stop being a fat person on purpose. And I wasn't.

It really spun me out, because then I was like—literally, like, “Oh, I don't want to hurt people. Do I need to, I don't know, get depressed again and gain weight on purpose?” (*Laughs.*) So, that kind of stuff is really—I feel like I understand how to navigate it now. And now, you know, since then—since I'm in sort of full-time ongoing brain treatment, my weight fluctuates. It goes up and down, and that's just a part of my reality. And you know, what am I going to do? Let a couple of people's weird projections control me? No, it's fine.

[00:50:00]

But it's a trip, I guess, is all I'm—I mean, and it is a thing—it's a unique thing that I don't think most people have to deal with. (*Laughs.*) Where other people feel some sort of entitlement to be a coauthor of your life. No!

(*They chuckle.*)

John Moe: Well, I appreciate you sharing this, I guess, journey. Somebody said the other day that they don't like the word journey, that it's overused. So, now I'm self-conscious about using the word journey.

Lindy West: I know. I also think it's overused, but it's just also—it's accurate. I don't know.

John Moe: I'm going to just substitute other bands like Journey for the word Journey. So, thanks for sharing your REO Speedwagon with us. I've enjoyed hearing your Foreigner and your Lover Boy.

Lindy West: (*Laughs.*) Well, thank you for asking such insightful questions about my Chicago.

John Moe: (*Laughs.*) Lindy West, thanks.

Lindy West: Thank you so much.

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

John Moe: You can find Lindy online at LindyWest.net or just by Googling her. Her podcast, which she hosts with Meagan Hatcher-Mays, is called *Text Me Back*.

Hey, we would sure appreciate it if you wrote rave reviews about this program on the podcast platform. Give us five stars. That's great. It helps us get our show out into the world where it can help people. Be sure to hit subscribe also; that makes a difference.

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Hi, credits listeners. Oh, great. Now whenever I hear the phrase “mental health journey”, I'm going to think of the band Journey—specifically the keyboard part on “Separate Ways”. Not sure why.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”. *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now!

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller.

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

Tom: Hey, this is Tom from Bloomington, Indiana. Just gotta say, things are gonna be all right. Keep on keeping on.

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!