Tony: This mother wrote us and she said, you know, my son's 18, he's got Asperger's syndrome and he's found this white nationalist community online, and she goes, you know what terrifies me the most, is these people have embraced and accepted my son in a way that no one has in his entire life.

Tristan Harris: That's Tony McAleer, a former organizer for the White Arian Resistance, or WAR. As a skinhead recruiter, he knew the most effective way to lure young people into a hateful movement was to simply catch them at a moment of isolation. They didn't have to share his beliefs or frequent far right chat rooms. They just had to feel hopelessly alone.

Tony: You know when he was in grade seven when he was 12, he invited his entire class to his birthday party and nobody showed up.

Tristan Harris: At this moment of desperation, a recruiter like Tony would show up and he wouldn't reason with them, he appealed to their emotions.

Tony: As human beings, we just want to belong, and those are deep, deep psychological trials. I'm sure that that kid would believe that the earth was flat, if that's what it took to get that kind of social acceptance.

Tristan Harris: Tony isn't sharing his story to make you feel pity for him or for those who share a hateful ideology. Instead, he wants you to understand the starting point of hatred. Before the headline grabbing horrors of the Christ Church shooting or the torch lit march at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, because before all that there's a private journey of one individual into a state of isolation. You can't understand the rise of extremist movements worldwide until you understand this first fork in the road, and how technology pushes more young people towards isolation, giving recruiters of hateful ideologies everywhere and opening to pull them in.

Tristan Harris: It's a chain of decisions that our guest on today's show, Tony McAleer, understands intimately.

Tony: Somebody said to me, you know, Tony, you seem like a nice guy. How in the hell did you lose your humanity? And I said, I didn't lose my humanity. I traded it for acceptance and approval until there was nothing left.

Tristan Harris: When his daughter was born, he began his journey out of white supremacy, waking up to the horrific decisions he made and co-founding Life After Hate, an organization that helps other extremists move beyond racism. He just published his first book, *The Cure for Hate: A Former White Supremacist's Journey from Violent Extremism to Radical Compassion*. The fundamental question here is a question about how society works. Is society just this good place, and then every now and then you get a few bad apples that show up? Or are there systemic forces that are growing bad apples? These are complex issues and there's obviously many different sources of the issues, but we wanted to go deep with someone who knows quite well at an inner psychological level, what is the root of this? We have to get a handle on how and why is this happening, and what role does technology have both in amplifying it and in potentially diffusing the problem before it gets worse.

Tristan Harris: I'm Tristan Harris Harris.

Aza Raskin: I'm Aza Raskin. And this is Your Undivided Attention.

Tony: I was not a tough kid growing up, but hanging out with skinheads, people feared me. Not because of me, because of who I was with. And I remember my mom saying, why are you hanging out with these guys? I don't get it, you've got your whole life ahead of you, you've got, you know, you can go to university, you can do this, you can do that. Everything's made available to you. Why do you choose to hang out with those guys? And when I think about it, they had what I didn't, and that was toughness. And for me to have their protection, I had to have their respect, and for me to have their respect, I had to commit all the same acts of violence that they did. And I willingly participated in all of that.

Tristan Harris: And so how did you first encounter the skinheads? What was that progression from those early experiences of trauma that you mentioned?

Tony: Well, I want to be clear, I don't ever, ever blame anything on my childhood. The reason I talk about what happened in my childhood is to help people understand the lens through which I made the choices that I did, and I have to accept responsibility and accountability for those choices. I came from a very affluent, privileged life. You know, my father was a psychiatrist who worked 70-80 hours a week and I went to private schools for most of my schooling. So I didn't come from what you might think is a broken down, impoverished family. When I was 10 I walked in on my father with another woman and that really started a series of events that had me spiral. I was really angry when that happened, I was confused, I felt betrayed. And after that I started acting out at school, and the school got together with my dad and my mom and they decided to try and improve my grades through beating me.

Tony: Then if I didn't get an A or a B on major tests and assignments, I was marched down to the teacher's office and hit on the rear end with the yard stick. The reason I talk about that is because, I think, even to this day, I do not think I've ever felt more powerless and helpless as I did in that office over and over and over again. At the end of grade nine, the Catholic school had had enough of me. They said, you know, there's not any one thing that he's done that is worthy of expulsion, but his general level of defiance is off the chart. You take him somewhere else and we want to expel him. And so I ended up wanting to go to England and I got into the whole punk scene because it vibed with the anger I was feeling, the anger I was carrying.

Tony: And from there I got into the skinhead thing, you know, the skinhead thing was a youth subculture that was mainstream. Not skinheads in the way that you think of them in North America. It wasn't political, it wasn't political at first. And then in the early eighties, 1984 I think, there was a single came out from a skinhead band called Screwdriver. It was the first overtly racist song I can remember, and it was called White Power. And that set the whole scene alight, and then the skinheads started to get in fights with punks over it. Skinheads got in fights with other skinheads over it. There was, you know, skinheads completely against racism and there was those that, like me, completely adopted it and it became an identity.

Tony: White power and white supremacy wasn't just what I believed in, it was who I was. It was the badges on my clothes, it was what I wore, it was what I listened to, it was what I talked about. It was in the movies and tapes I watched and listened to. It was, you know, and this is the challenge with talking to anybody in that space today, identity and ideology were completely intertwined. And when somebody has their identity and their ideology intertwined, there's no rational discussion you can have with that person because, to attack the ideology is to attack their identity and all the ego defense mechanisms kick in.

Tristan Harris: One of the reasons we wanted to have you on the podcast, is obviously the rise of extremism, of white supremacy. And in 2018 there were 50 domestic extremist murders, all of which were committed by perpetrators with ties to right wing extremists. Right wing extremism is also responsible for 73% of extremist killings over the last decade compared to 23% for Islamic extremism and 3% for left wing extremism. So how do you account for these trends? And I know we're going to get into technology's role in amplifying some of it, but what I really appreciate about talking to you is, going into the inner experience.

Tony: That's a great question. You're absolutely right about those numbers. And for the longest time the focus of government response has been towards ISIS and Al Qaeda inspired extremism. And you can look at ISIS, al-Baghdadi. There was a head to the snake. This violent far right, it's the snake without a head. There's not this cohesive organizing personality or ideology, it's like the ideology exists in cyberspace and people come into it and people exit it. But it's always there and there's no way to remove it. I mean, when I first got involved, if you wanted information, you'd order a book or a video cassette, you know, when those things were still existing or audio cassettes. And it might take a month for it to get to you and you'd listen to it and then you'd order something else. And then it took months or years to really red pill and rabbit hole. But with the internet now, there is no bottleneck. The only bottleneck is your ability to consume information. And you can binge watch an ideology in a weekend now.

Tristan Harris: Well, and it's sort of an anti-bottleneck because the premise is to remove as much friction as possible. I mean, what you're saying about having to order the book or the cassette tape, if you think of the choice architecture of that moment and the fact that you have to wait a month for it to arrive and you have to dole out the money, so many barriers.

Tony: So many barriers to entry, and if you wanted to go meet other people, you had to go physically meet them. And there might be protesters, that might be law enforcement. There was all kinds of barriers to entry, and the internet, with the illusion of anonymity, that's all gone. There's no barriers to entry. Dylan Roof started his journey from Googling black on white crime.

Aza Raskin: There's a 2018 study in Germany, it was across all of Germany. It's from the University of Warwick, and then what they discovered is that if you dose a city with Facebook, that is, they aren't using Facebook than they use Facebook for a week. In that week, violent crimes against immigrants Rose by 50%. The ecosystem, the ecological surround really does change behavior and it leaks into the real world. There's a sort of a famous quote by Reed Hoffman that social networks do best when they tap into the seven deadly sins, and he gives the example of LinkedIn as greed, but Facebook, it's ego.

Aza Raskin: And then he says, "I like to emphasize the importance of the deep universal psychological structure in people's minds", which given the business model, means it's sort of creating a digital Frankenstein that's finding the fractures exactly where people need to feel belonging and connection.

Tony: It doesn't care who it's connecting, you know, it just is a connector. And it's a community builder and therein lies the challenge. And what's fascinating is the University of Maryland and their studies of terrorism responses to terrorism, they have their first data set of people enmeshed in the violent far right online that have never met another human being involved in that. Always before until about 2015-2016, people were involved online, but there was always at least one human connection to it. And what they now have is people who've never met another human involved in the ideology that they're drawn into.

Aza Raskin: At some point you became a skinhead recruiter and I'm really curious, what were you looking for? What were the tells or the vulnerabilities, that you identify them? And I'm of course asking in a little bit because it starts pointing at directions for solutions.

Tony: Right, I mean I was looking for people to join us, and it was people with those vulnerabilities that responded to what we offered, was again, that acceptance, approval, safety. And when we found someone that was looking for that, it was like, come on board.

Tristan Harris: I've studied cults, and they find people in moments of transition where they are about to abandon one identity and join another and they're looking for belonging and kind of affirmation of something new. And it's those moments in between when we're most vulnerable. When you go back to just the beginning of your story and talking about the importance of social validation and approval and safety in a world where you didn't have that coming from a more difficult upbringing, if I think about what's the quickest, easiest thing to reach for if I'm a person who doesn't have social elevation, well online is just a lot faster. It's the fastest acting. It's false, but it's a form of social validation, that's what social media is designed for.

Tony: You know, absolutely. And, to draw the incels into this, so incel is involuntary celibates, and they are young men who are angry at the fact that they can't meet women. The Chads and the Nancys is their slang term. The Chads are the guys that have no problem meeting women and you know, they pick on all the Nancy's, and the Nancys are looking at the Chads, and nobody's looking at the incels. And they're angry and pissed off. And what social media has provided, and the internet has provided, the ability for those people to connect with other people like them. So that now there's not just a hundred thousand people playing Ataris in their basement, there are now 100,000 people connected and they can complain and create this echo chamber where they're super angry at women because of their inability to interact.

Tony: You're not going to go on to Instagram and take pictures to get social validation. Where you will get it is through the extreme satire in excoriation of all that world that they feel excluded from, and then you're in this sort of echo chamber of extreme satire to them. It's funny, but they become so desensitized that what they find is funny after a while is pretty hardcore. In an age where internet pornography is everywhere, it would be the equivalent of, you know, 30-40 years ago, kids sharing dirty pictures amongst themselves

that they couldn't get access to, and it becomes this trade in the elicit, the taboo. You know, and the society that has rejected me, I'm going to gore their values in the most profane way possible.

Tristan Harris: It's easy to look at these things and say, Oh, you know, these people who happen to be isolated as opposed to, okay, let's look at the 2.7 billion people that are jacked into one of these platforms, YouTube being very popular, for example. And it's designed, obviously, to capture attention, which means it's designed to prefer to have people by themselves on a screen watching without talking to anyone. So each website is competing to isolate people. And then when you're by yourself and you're atrophying the kind of social muscles that are involved in the social awkward process of reaching out and talking to a stranger.

Tristan Harris: You know, from an evolutionary psychology perspective, talking to a stranger is incredibly risky because that would be like, you get hurt if you talk to a stranger. But what happens when people are increasingly pulled into an atrophied state where they haven't an exercised those muscles with the entire ecosystem of supercomputers pointed at 2 billion people's brains are designed to maximize that individual isolated experience. And then, as you said, it's even easier if I want, let's say the romantic connection, the easiest, fastest choice to reach for his pornography, not an easy way to connect with someone else.

Tristan Harris: Imagine a world where it was actually easier to reach for a salsa dance class than it was for Reddit or Instagram and dance classes were just everywhere. Meaning, environments in which Charm and attraction and chemistry kind of automatically appear. If those spaces were on the top of life's menu and they were abundant, how different would our world look? And I mean, going back to the beginning of your story, I heard two basic psychological needs. The one of this was a place of getting social approval and the other was, this is a place of feeling safe in a world that didn't feel safe. Right now, social approval and safety are most efficiently provided by these isolating tech platforms.

Tony: Your expression of social atrophy is brilliant. I have not heard that before, but it absolutely hits the nail on the head. And what's amazing is we've never been more connected and we've never been more disconnected at the same time. When we're in those isolated places where a friend or someone else might be able to pick up on something going wrong or might be able to hold us back, that doesn't exist.

Aza Raskin: I think we will look back at this time and find it crazy that we use the entire might of technology to get us to look away from each other. How do you give up an identity? What did your mind do? How did you step away?

Tony: I left the movement at a time when social media didn't exist, and everybody in the movement knew me as Tony McAleer. My ID and my birth certificate and everything was Antony McAleer, so when I embarked on the new career in the early two thousands, my business card said Antony McAleer and if you Google Anthony McAleer, you get a completely different result than if you Google Tony McAleer. I hid from my past at the beginning. You know, my daughter was born, I remember holding her in the delivery room and she opened her eyes for the first time, and my blurry face was the first picture that she was going to take, her brain is going to take. And for the first time I connected with another human being, since, I couldn't remember when. That changed

me. I know that I left that room a different person than entered it. It took some time for it to play out.

Tony: I became a full time single father. That became my new identity. I mean, it wasn't easy to give up the old one, I had so much social capital invested. I had so much momentum in that identity of who I was, but I started to get, as a single dad in the 90s, and that it's completely unfair, everybody was patting me on the back. Oh my God, I can't believe you're a single dad. No single mother in the nineties got that type of attention, but it gave me, again, acceptance, approval and attention, but in a healthy way this time. And so I had an identity to transition to and, because the movement I was involved with was so toxic, and I remember just about the time when me and the mother split up, two guys came into my house to ask me about, did so-and-so who I knew sleep with so-and-so's, one of the guy's girlfriends?

Tony: And, I knew, but you know, it's none of my business I don't want to talk about it. And they just sort of knocked the door in, pushed me backwards. And you know, in front of my children, I had my two front teeth knocked into 45 degrees and one of them fell out, and a mouth full of blood. And my son is sitting there watching it, and I'm like, these people supposed to be on my side, and this is such a toxic place to be in. And it always is because you can't be that angry and hateful all the time and surround yourself with that and not live in toxicity. And so at the age of 20 when I didn't have children, I thought I'd be dead or in jail by the age of 30 as a white revolutionary. And once I had children, I'm like, well, is it really a fair for me to continue down that path with children? And for the first time in my life I thought of someone else other than myself.

Tristan Harris: Well, one thing you've talked about in your previous experience of getting into white supremacy was, I think you called it bad serendipity, being exposed to the wrong thing at the wrong time. The Greek concept is Kairos, like it's sort of the ideal goal of advertisers is you want to reach people with the message at the moment when they're most receptive to that message. But you know, there's sort of this hate serendipity. If you think about YouTube as is sort of offering something that if you start on one white supremacy video and it says, well, here's 10 more, it's sort of the worst nightmare of being offered bad serendipity. The wrong thing at the wrong time.

Tristan Harris: I remember talking to someone who was in Alcoholics Anonymous and they said when they're feeling like they're going to take a drastic action, any kind of drastic action, they halt, H-A-L-T. Which means, they ask, am I hungry, angry, lonely or tired? And you stop, and that sort of a tool to say, before I act as if this is an authentic choice coming out of me in a free, informed, wise way, are any of these pre-conditions true? And it strikes me that the technology is not really aware of HALT, you know, are we hungry, angry, lonely or tired? And do you want to talk a little about that kind of serendipity? Because I think it's a critical part of fixing some of these issues.

Tony: Well, and I think it can be a critical part to the solution as well. To be that angry all the time, surrounded by angry people all the time is draining, and there's a lot of churn that goes on in the movement. But I think that provides an opportunity not to counter the beliefs, right? Because the challenge, you know, someone who has got their identity and ideology intertwined, you go and attack their ideology, you're also attacking their identity and all the ego defense mechanisms go up. But if you can give them something to think about that questions their involvement, not from an ideological perspective, but

from an interpersonal perspective, I guarantee you the relationships are going to be horrible. There's ways that we can trigger disillusionment, and if we could take someone that might be 10 years in the movement and get them to quit at 6, that's harm reduction.

Tony: And I think that rather than try and counter facts and figures, we take a more introspective and emotional approach and get them to question where they're at and what's going on. I think we have the opportunity to use technology to do a great deal of harm reduction because I was a complete narcissist. I was into my ego, the glorification of everything I did and I didn't think about the harm I committed to anyone else. I was totally in my ego and narcissism. But that changed once I had children, and it's a common theme that happens with people that join any kind of violent extremist group. And in 2011, Google Ideas put on this summit called the Summit Against Violent Extremism, and they invited 50 former violent extremists. They had to be working for peace, so it's not like they were active. And you had former members of the IRA, and former members of the Ulster Volunteer Force who were their Protestant nemesis.

Tony: You had Jo Barry, whose father was killed in the IRA hotel bombing in the 80s and you know, she travels with the guy that planted the bomb. He's out of prison now and they work together to foster peace. You had Bloods, Crips, skinheads, neo-Nazis, you name it. Every race, faith, geography, gender, ideology. It transcended all of that stuff. And during that, heard these stories of how people got into it and how people left. And they were so similar, these themes that kept showing up and the acceptance, belonging, approval, all of that kind of stuff. A sense of purpose, a sense of joining something much bigger than themselves. And on the other side, one of the things that was always there in those that had left, was a story that in some way, shape or form, centered around compassion. Whether it be compassion for someone who they had once de humanized, and was showing compassion to them.

Tony: And it really blew me and the other six co-founders of Life After Hate away, and we came back from that absolutely inspired and motivated and dedicated to helping people leave where we once were.

Aza: How were the conditions created so that so many people from opposite sides could come together? How do you create spaces like that?

Tony: So at Life After Hate, we despise the ideology that we once believed, we despise the activity, but we never despise the human being. And I think that we must remember that, that no one is irredeemable. The answer is not to judge people, it's not to dox people, it's not to ban people. The answer is to rehumanize people. And I've seen it successfully practiced over and over and over again. If we drill down deeper into the psyche, we get to, and I think this is a common thread amongst all violent extremist groups, gangs.

Tony: It's also common thread from addiction, eating disorders. These ridiculous ideas that we have about ourselves, we call that toxic shame. What defines a healthy emotion is, it's transitory, it comes and it goes. When we're dealing with toxic shame, we're dealing with these beliefs deep at the core of our subconscious identity belief system. You know, that we're not good enough and we either project it onto other people or we internalize it. And verbal abuse, rage, you know, which is 24/7 anger, violence, gangs,

violent extremism. Murder is the ultimate externalized chain response. Or we do it to ourselves and that's substance abuse, it's eating, cutting, eating disorders, risky sexual behavior, playing a sport where you break a bone every... I did both. And the ultimate internalized shame response is a suicide.

Tony: I was not the first kid that got beaten at Catholic school. I was not the first kid that had adultery in the household, there's millions of each of those two things. There's lots of people that didn't go down the path that I went to, but I guarantee you they went down a different path that was destructive. Dr. James Gilligan, who wrote the book *Violence: The Study of a National Epidemic*, and I think he was a forensic psychiatrist at one of the prisons in California. And in his book he says, I never witnessed or became aware of an act of violence that wasn't rooted in shame and humiliation.

Tristan Harris: I was reading some of the literature before this interview, on the violence in shootings, and how 80% of people who are incarcerated who had participated in a shooting, had actually had suicidal thoughts before that. And what it takes to basically believe that this is the best option, that there isn't sort of a better future, there isn't some other thing that's going to happen. And you mentioned earlier in your story, you said that you assumed you'd be in jail when you were 20, I think is what you said.

Tony: Dead or in jail.

Tristan Harris: Dead or in jail, yeah. And I think this is a really interesting thing about, can people imagine, with the identity that they're wearing, a future? And if you can't then it's more natural that you would go down this different path. Would you talk a little about that? I think that's a very interesting invisible belief that people hold, whether or not there is a future.

Tony: For me, it's not surprising that we are having such an increase in mass shootings and racial shootings as we've seen over the last two years. At the same time, if you look at these two studies from Princeton, Death by Despair, the suicide rate amongst white men has never been higher either. Suicide is the number one cause of death for middle aged white men. And I think to understand what's going on in the country, we need to understand why people are either so angry that they're killing people in mass shootings or killing themselves. It's an indicator that something seriously wrong is happening. Something is disruptive in the ecosystem so to speak.

Tristan Harris: I want to make sure that we talk about how social media has been amplifying some of these things. So I just want to name a couple stats here. 4chan is a very famous message board where a lot of young people hang out. 70% of 4chan users are male, and 4chan is the second most frequently credited website in red pilling stories into white nationalism. But 39 of the 75 fascist activists that they studied in this Bellingcat study, say that YouTube was the single most frequently discussed website. So YouTube was the most discussed website as a red pill opening the gateway drug.

Tony: It's becoming less so much about the videos that are actually recorded, as the way that they use the comments section on the videos. How can we be smart about it? It's a challenge, I mean back in the bad old days I had a computerized voicemail system. I'd press one for this, press two for that. And people from all over the world recording

messages for other people to hear, and end up going to the Supreme Court of Canada twice.

Tony: My phone line received the most calls when it was under the most threat of censorship. At its peak it was getting 300 calls a day to a single line, and so we have to think about the unintended consequences of how we respond to this. It's easy for the uninitiated to say, well let's just ban it all. What are the unintended consequences? Because I remember when I was getting into the punk thing in the late seventies, and I was in England when God Save the Queen was banned from airplay by the Sex Pistols, and it became number one because of that. So we have to find what the right balance is.

Tristan Harris: There's a temptation when you see all this hate speech to say, just shut it down, take it off, ban it from the platform, kick it off. The second you do that, you just move it into a dark space like the dark web, and then it's not tracked. You move it into signal chats or into telegram channels where there's 2000 white nationalists on these things. I mean, even with Facebook's recent decision to say, we're moving away from public newsfeeds and we're moving into encrypted private groups, you know, the challenge with this is you can't trace anything that's happening. So Facebook's own security team, they're basically saying, we're throwing away the key so now it's not our responsibility if suddenly at the anti-vaccine groups or the white nationalist groups or the hate groups all sort of suddenly triple, quadruple, 10x in size because now they don't know.

Tristan Harris: And also obviously the amplification of these groups has continued over the last few years. And now we're in the situation where we have to reverse from an unnatural state of how much additional hate and radicalization extremism is out there. But you know, Tony, you have this project called We Counter Hate: The Campaign. Do you want to talk a little bit about the effect of that?

Tony: Sure. We Counter Hate was, we partnered with a creative agency in Seattle called Possible. And they contacted us and we helped them work with AI machine learning. So when, when somebody posts this hateful tweet, the AI would flag it, send it to a human to go yay or nay, and if they said yay, the AI would post a response to the tweet and it would say, this message has been countered. And if you want to retweet this message, we're going to give a donation to Life After Hate, who helps to fight racism. And what they found was almost instantly, 65 to 70% drop in retweets. 18% of the time the message was deleted by the author, and an unintended consequence was 30% of the time the accounts were investigated and suspended by Twitter itself.

Tony: But we found a way to reduce that amplification and I think the key to what made it successful, because I've also talked to a PhD at Yale, and in his case, what they would do is they would find people that were posting really nasty stuff in Twitter. Then they would send them messages saying, Hey, you know, there's a human being on the other end of that. And when people were sort of dropped out of their bubble of perceived anonymity and like, "Hey, there's somebody watching", they had to think about what they did, all of a sudden the behavior changed.

Tristan Harris: I mean, this is so common. If you asked people, would you take a a megaphone and stand in the middle of a baseball stadium with 50,000 people in it and shout hate into the megaphone, right in front of 50,000 people, it'd be like, Whoa, no, I would never do that.

Tristan Harris: But Twitter's kind of handing out megaphones that reach 50,000 people that are stadium sized audiences, every day. And what it's shifted, is obviously this relationship to accountability that you can kind of do it anonymously, do it quickly and it's sort of a drive by hate speech. It happens so quickly and then there's nothing that happens, and I think the question you're asking with these kind of projects, is how do we reduce hate without censorship? Because we know that suppression doesn't change it, just moves it. It's like you're squeezing the balloon over here and it just pops up on the other side, you didn't actually solve the problem.

Tristan Harris: Tristan here. We'll get back to the interview in a moment, but first, what can we do about this? Remember the email from that guy who said preventing live broadcasting and hate speech, remember this guy wrote into us? Farza Fallah wrote into us after hearing us talk about some of these things and he said, "social media companies can combat live broadcasting of hate crimes. If they announced that for each view of a hate crime video against a minority group, they'll show content promoting that group to a thousand users. So for example, after the New Zealand attack, for every view of that video, they would show ads promoting Muslim scientists, artists, athletes, and their contribution to the world for their users. This can compliment their machine learning efforts to detect and remove such videos quickly and can have an immense impact."

Aza Raskin: Yeah, I love that idea.

Tristan Harris: I have another stat here from the Anti-Defamation League. 30% of online antisemitic attacks are actually even initiated by bots, because in addition to the natural stuff that we're talking about, there's also bots that are being created to instill hate. It's like we already have sort of autonomous drones, they're just speech drones, and they're shooting hate all around the internet. And I think it's confusing because you can't, when this is all happening so quickly, people don't even know what's real.

Tony: Yeah. And Twitter's response to dealing with those kinds of bot accounts and the larger implications around elections and all that kind of stuff, what they're doing to counteract that has made it impossible for the AI bot we were working with to counter hate. And I think the project is actually being sunsetted now because Twitter's making changes that make it no longer possible to keep doing what we were doing.

Tristan Harris: And so when you think about this, and you were asked, I think it was a house committee, you know, what would you do with $1 billion to go after the systemic forces with this problem? Given, this is really urgent, there's likely to be multiple more shootings in the next few months because of this. And so I think whatever people in the technology industry or policymakers or media should hear, you know, this is your opportunity to reach people.

Tony: We need to empower local communities. You know, this is not something Life After Hate can possibly even put a 5% dent in. It's so huge and it's a whole of society problem that requires a whole of society solution. And we resources in every community. We're starting to work at, whether it be law enforcement, mental health, social workers, school resource officers, or school counselors, how to recognize it when it's in front of you. So you know, there's some obvious signs that people aren't aware of. For example, 1488, someone might see that and go like, Oh, that's a weird number. But the one and the four stands for 14 words, which is, we must secure the existence of our race and

the future for white children. And then 88 is the eighth letter of the alphabet, HH, heil, Hitler. There's all kinds of coded things.

Tony: You've got Pepe the frog and you've got this and that and you've got the hand symbols. And if people aren't educated, people that are on the front line that are counselors, police officers, social workers and such. They're not aware of that stuff, they'll miss it. They walk right past them and they wouldn't recognize it. So we help them to recognize when it's in front of them, and then once they've recognized it, how do they interface with it? And they can be... Whatever their modality of training is, we add some evidence-based tools and techniques that provide the best chance of success in interacting with that person. That's not a guarantee, nothing's a guarantee, but at least it gives you the best possible chance to interact with it.

Aza Raskin: This is a question I had, you talk a lot about compassion as sort of a main vehicle for helping people step away from that identity. I'm curious, you do a lot of these sort of eight hour long deep life studies, like why people are there. What have you learned about specifically why compassion helps people out, and then what lessons are there for technology from that deep work you've done?

Tony: If the reason people are in is because they're disconnected from their humanity, the answer isn't to go in through the head and try and change their ideas. It's to try and change their relationship with themselves. I've talked before about shame and toxic shame and the feeling of being less than. The antidote to shame is compassion, and when we're compassionate with someone, we hold a mirror up to them and allow them to see their humanity reflected back at them. We teach them, as my children did to me. I saw a version of me reflected in their eyes that I couldn't see when I looked in the mirror. If internal dehumanization is the cause and the problem, then internal re-humanization is a solution, the answer. We have to sort of look at it that way. And I'll tell you that the ego has incredible defenses to keep itself alive, that's what's what it's there for. So going in through the head is an incredibly difficult process. But what it doesn't have good defenses for us is when we come in through the heart.

Aza Raskin: I think we're in our technological adolescence and in some ways technology being a mirror, it's a distorting mirror, and we look into it and we don't really like what we see, and the solution-

Tony: But we're addicted to it anyways.

Aza Raskin: Right, exactly. And the solution is that compassion, it's the taking a clear eyed look at ourselves, at our hardware, at our software, how we work, our vulnerabilities, our strengths and our brilliance. Having an honest conversation about that so that we can decide what we're going to do.

Tony: And that's a great analogy that you used, because I think if we look at the mind and the ego, that's hardware. The heart is where the software is. And I think the answer is not... We can't necessarily change the hardware, but we can come in and change the code. We can change the code and change the software when you get different results out of the hardware.

Tristan Harris: The question I have is just how do we do that at scale? I know in something else I read about your background, was how critical it was... You mentioned a 10 day meditation retreat and I've been on silent meditation retreat myself. These are incredible, profound experiences and thinking about what are the experiences that do that. So when I say this on a technology oriented podcast, I don't mean how does technology reconnect us to our hearts, but what are the life experiences that reconnect us to our hearts? And then if I think about how technology either supports that or doesn't, how can it privilege those kinds of choices? I'm just wondering how that can happen at scale?

Tony: I think firstly, the message of my book is one of hope. I absolutely believe that the dehumanization, the polarization, everything we're going through, it's probably going to get worse before it gets better, but I'm absolutely hopeful. And the way that we do it, is we have to start, we have to look at, we have to ask ourselves this question, "Who am I going to be in every moment of every day?" We have an incredible ability to influence and inspire people around us. And I think the people in the middle that are not the polarization and the dehumanization on either side, and being in the middle doesn't mean being neutral. Being in the middle is just, you can see the humanity in people and not write them off.

Tony: And it's who am I going to be in every moment of every day? I spent 15 years in this movement thinking that I could change the world outside of me. And what I found is now, I have more ability and influence to change the world outside of me by changing the world inside of me. I changed myself, I changed the world around me. And I think that's what people need to start doing is, how can I be a better and an inspirational human being in the face of all of this stuff, which seems daunting?

Aza Raskin: So I was just going to bring up the irony of the number of mindfulness classes inside of Facebook and Google and the tech companies, which, and it's a great thing, right? We should have more technologists and people making software that has huge service in our daily lives thinking about mindfulness, and yet there's this juxtaposition, this paradox that the technology they're creating is possibly the biggest driver against and away from mindfulness. To hold both of those in their head at the same time, I never quite understand how they can do it.

Tony: No, I chuckled when you told me that. That's very interesting. One of the things that I learned, because I spent most of my life with the ego driving the bus, and the ego should never be driving the bus. Never, never should the ego be driving the bus and the ego, when it's not tethered to the heart, it's like letting a balloon go. You don't know where it's going to go, it goes into crazy weird places. And I think the heart should always be driving the bus and the ego, we shouldn't get rid of the ego. The ego is important, but it's okay being a backseat driver, you know, giving a bit of chirp every now and again. But the heart should be driving the bus.

Tristan Harris: Well Tony, thank you so much for coming on this podcast and I really hope people check out your book and your work at Life After Hate. Your book is called *The Cure for Hate*. Thank you for coming on.

Tony: No, thank you for having me.

Aza Raskin: It's been a real pleasure.

Tristan Harris: Your Undivided Attention is produced by the Center for Humane Technology. Our executive producer is Dan Kedmey, our associate producer is Natalie Jones.

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