**Center for Humane Technology | Your Undivided Attention Podcast**
**Episode 52: Transcending the Internet Hate Game with Dylan Marron**

Tristan Harris: Hey everyone. It's Tristan. Real quick before we dive, in The Center for Humane Technology is hiring. And we've talked about the foundations of humane technology course on this podcast before. Well, now we're looking for a humane innovation lead, this is a product management role that will serve a range of stakeholders and help support the emerging humane technology ecosystem, primarily through this new online course, foundations of humane technology. To learn more, visit humanetech.com/careers. And with that, here we go.

Tristan Harris: Elon Musk is a player of games and he wins the games he plays, but the game he's potentially about to buy the Twitter game, is a game that rewards outrage. It's a game that we win by being better than the other players at dunking on each other and straw manning each other, and assuming the worst in each other. It's quite a provocation to tell the winner of games that the game itself must be transformed. But we can also decide to step out of the game and to do something different. Our guest today, Dylan Marron is doing something very different on social media. I'm Tristan Harris.

Aza Raskin: And I'm Aza Raskin.

Tristan Harris: And this is Your Uninvited Attention the podcast from The Center for Humane Technology. Dylan Marron has been called by Jason Sudeikis a modern Mr. Rogers for the digital age. He's the creator and host of Conversations with People Who Hate Me. On the show, he steps out of the game by calling up people behind negative comments on the internet and asking them a simple question, why did you write that? Dylan recently published a book, also called Conversations with People Who Hate Me, where he elaborates 12 lessons learned from talking with internet strangers. Dylan comes from the left and negative comments toward him usually come from the right, but online harassment is universal.

Tristan Harris: Dylan, it's great to have you.

Dylan Marron: Thank you so much for having me.

Tristan Harris: Well, I thought I would open up just for many listeners who follow our podcast Your Undivided Attention, we often talk about a lot of really seemingly intractable problems, we talk about climate change, the way civil war can emerge, the way social media drives polarization that can bring us towards these kinds of bigger risks. And it often feels like change is impossible. You look in the mirror of social media and you see this addicted outraged, polarized, petty, petulant society. And you thought that if that's who we are, then I think we don't actually have hope. And I think the premise of your work and ours is that we're staring through this fun house mirror, and that's not who we are, we have the ability to be compassionate and open-minded and good to each other.

Tristan Harris: And you are one of the real people on the front lines, developing and rediscovering how to do this in the digital environment, and you're doing it in a very one-on-one way and I really recommend people check out your podcast Conversations with People Who Hate Me. I thought it'd be a good, just to start with your origin story. Can you sort of take us back?

Dylan Marron: I'll take you fully back. So, I cracked into this all because in 2015, I made a video series called Every Single Word that edited down popular films to only the word spoken by people of color. And it was a way to comment on the lack of racial representation on screen and this blew up. This project that I made in my bedroom off of DVDs that I took out from the library was this zero dollar project that contributed to the international conversation about representation on screen. And I was blown away, right? This thing that you can make, you can say something about the world to the world and the world will listen. And I was wide-eyed, I believed in the future of talking about progressive issues online, bringing more people to the table.

Dylan Marron: So, I was able to engage with all of the new fans and supporters I was getting, and I could click on their profile picture and learn everything about them, this was of course, a joy to do with my fans. When you blow up online, and when you also are getting popular for making satirical videos that were from my perspective, which is to say progressive, you also get a lot of hate. And the detail of Facebook comes in because every time I got a piece of hate, whether it was a comment or a message, I created this ritual for myself, where I would click on the profile picture of the person who sent it and unlike other platforms like YouTube or even Twitter, I was often transported into a portal to every picture ever taken of this person for the last 10 years and a partial family tree and a resume. So, that was my coping mechanism. It was to convince myself that this person wasn't this distant other, but someone who I could potentially reach, but this was all in my head, these were back stories I was making in my head.

Dylan Marron: Then one day, one thing led to another and I found myself on the phone with someone who had sent me a homophobic message and he was a teenager in high school. And on this phone call, I felt as if I was piercing the echo chamber, transcending the echo chamber and doing this incredibly subversive act of having a conversation with someone who the waves of the algorithms did not want me to actually have a conversation with and it felt like this incredibly hopeful act that we were able to reach each other, even though the beginning of our relationship was I would, say a fraught one in that he sent me a homophobic message and we connected. And from there, and from the success of that first call, I wondered how many other people might be willing to talk and have conversations like these.

Tristan Harris: So, maybe this is a good time to dive into that story, I really do want to get into your mind and into your eyes and into your fingers and feel what it's like to receive that much hate. So, I'd love to hear that, what was going through your

nervous system, what was going through your mind, really bring us through that process.

Dylan Marron: I can tell you it was horrible. I think I can speak about it, in such a removed way now, but I think I felt a few things. One was, I felt hurt that me developing a career and me finding success in making videos had to come with such a negative consequence so immediately. It's such a hyper present consequence that comes with gaining popularity online. And I think two, I also felt scared and the most honest thing I can say is that I just didn't know how to process it. No one is adequately prepared to deal with the onslaught of negativity online. And we're seeing this with shame culture, we're seeing this with pile ons, our brains are not set up for this kind of volume.

Dylan Marron: I developed that habit of scanning their profile, constructing this fictional backstory for them, because I needed to know that they were human beings. I needed to feel like they weren't these digital online avatars, but that they were a human being.

Tristan Harris: And then drop us into that very first conversation when you move beyond sort of doing almost the inverse of stalking someone online to sort of showing up at their front door, if their front door is the telephone.

Dylan Marron: Yeah. The first conversation I had with Josh, it came about because I had scrolled through a bunch of hate messages I got and made fun of their typos at a comedy show, I put that video online and Josh recognized himself in the video. And so he messaged me directly and he suggested, "Do you want to talk, here's my number, can we hop on the phone?" And-

Tristan Harris: He sent you his number?

Dylan Marron: Yeah, it was Josh.

Tristan Harris: Well, actually I also want to just mark out what you just said, because your initial reaction was actually, you got all these hate messages and you started, I believe screen shotting them and then like you said, using them in your comedy search. So that was the first reaction. I think a lot of people relate to that, right? Someone says something hateful to you and so you have a way of coping with that, you send it to a friend, be like, "Look what this person said to me." And you're doing that in a public setting. And then he invited you to talk to him?

Dylan Marron: So there was a twist in that performance that I uploaded where I scrolled through comments. I was subverting the common practice at the time of calling a detractors employer to get them fired. And basically I led the audience through the fact is like, "This is something I got, here are all the typos. Let's of course laugh at the typos." Something I definitely no longer do. And then I found his employer because it was listed on his profile. So he listed Best Buyer as his

employer, I called his employer. And just when everyone thought that I was going to ask him to be fired, I left a positive customer review as if I was his customer.

Tristan Harris: As Dylan later found out, Josh never actually worked at Best Buy, but the point is the audience thought Dylan was trying to get Josh fired. And instead Dylan left him a glowing review.

Dylan Marron: Anyway, Josh saw the video of me making fun of his typos and he suggested a phone call. And I remember feeling shocked that he even saw the video. I remember there was just a pit in my stomach. My stomach just drops and he gives me his number. He asks to talk. And so we set a time to talk the very next day. And on this phone call, it felt like the logical next step of all the fictional back stories that I was creating, it felt like connecting with someone. And by connecting with him, I felt like I was looking the fear in the face and looking the negativity in the face and actively doing something to address it. And by connecting with him, I was no longer scared of him. He no longer became a distant other, he became a reachable person. This isn't our first conversation, because that first conversation was, as you can imagine off the record so that this was when we recorded a conversation for my podcast.

Aza Raskin: It's helpful to know that too. Right. Your first conversation was an off the record, just getting to know you... And then you asked him, "Hey actually, could I record a conversation between us?" Just to sort of... What was the instinct behind that?

Dylan Marron: Well, I think I wanted to share it because it felt like I had stumbled on a bridge that wasn't on any maps like no social media maps, no one told you that this bridge was possible. And I think the conversation felt so hopeful to me that I wanted more people to hear it. And I think I was coming from such my content was so entrenched in the side of progressivism versus them, the other side. And I felt like I was hungry to try something different and connect with the people who I had been "battling" in my videos.

Tristan Harris: So now we're going to hear a clip from episode two of conversations with people who hate me, where Dylan is having his second conversation with Josh. But this time on the record.

Dylan Marron: Hey, is this Josh?

Josh: Hey. Yeah, it is.

Dylan Marron: How's your day going so far?

Josh: It's good. How are you?

Dylan Marron: Oh, I'm good. So Josh, what inspired you to send that message to me? What sparked that first message?

Josh: I was just angry about it all. It was a buildup of all your multiple videos you made of stuff and I just got mad.

Dylan Marron: Can you remember what specific video I made that sparked that first message?

Josh: Police brutality, unboxing.

Dylan Marron: Unboxing police brutality. Okay. So tell me a little about you.

Josh: Well, my name is Josh. I'm 18 years old. I am currently a senior in high school graduating in two weeks.

Dylan Marron: Congratulations.

Josh: Thank you very much.

Dylan Marron: Yeah. How is high school for you?

Josh: Am I allowed to use the HE double hockey stick word?

Dylan Marron: Oh yeah. You're allowed to.

Josh: It was hell.

Dylan Marron: Really?

Josh: And it's still hell right now, even though it's only two weeks left.

Dylan Marron: How have the last four years been hell?

Josh: When you're different in any shape, form or way. If you're not the "popular girls, popular guys, football players," then you're not well liked. And I'm a little bit tougher than a lot of people. And people seem to judge me before they get to know me. In high school people seem to pick and choose who they like based on what you look like rather than who you are. Because when you're in high school, it's all about perfection. If you get your clothes from Walmart, you're an outcast. If you don't have the hottest new clothes, you're an outcast. I'm a little bit bigger. I don't like to use the word fat, but I am a little bit bigger than a lot of my classmates. And they seem to judge me before they even got to know me. I've been called a sad ass. I don't know if I can say that.

Dylan Marron: Yeah, you're allowed to.

Josh: Okay. I've been called stupid, idiotic. I've been told nobody cares about me. Just yesterday someone told me I was ugly as hell. I don't exactly know how ugly hell is, but I don't think it's pretty.

Dylan Marron: Well. I mean that's awful of them. I mean, I also just want to let you know Josh, I was bullied in high school too.

Tristan Harris: I think it's really good for people to just hear a flavor of the conversation. Especially that last part where he's talking about how hard it is for him being at high school and getting picked on and being a chubby your kid. And just what struck me actually, Dylan, in listening to a lot of the episodes of your podcast is how much people who lash out are hurting. And there's this tri statement hurt people, hurt people, it's a such a cliche, but it just rings so true every episode of yours that I listen to.

Tristan Harris: And then people would say maybe, well then that's just human nature. If hurt people are hurt people, then the internet is just a mirror of people's hurt. And so therefore the internet's not doing the hurting, it's not doing the harassment it's just showing you how many people in your society like a mirror, a neutral mirror. Because we talk about how that's not true, but you're on the front lines of really exploring this hate harassment machine that we keep talking about, but you're really in the experiencing of it and going in the backstory. Tell us about that.

Dylan Marron: Yeah. Hurt people hurt people is a concise, poetic phrase for a reason. I think you're right, that it's true, but the internet and how we interact with each other and the tools we use to interact with each other has exacerbated that so much. And I think something that I've actually been expressing more and more recently is that hurt people, hurt people is only sometimes true. It's not a fair catchall for everyone. And what I'm realizing is that another big source of internet negativity is the gamification of online spaces and how often people are elevated to this platform to become punching bags, we call it Twitter's main character.

Dylan Marron: And there is someone who you can establish your identity by opposing. There is someone who you can stake your claim in the public square by throwing a tomato at. And I think what's really scary about that is that it actually doesn't mean that you are enduring existential pain and that's why you express negativity to someone it's that we're dealing with gamification. And the fact that some people are saying something negative because they can score points in the game of the internet.

Dylan Marron: Also I think there's just the ease we have to express things to each other. I can DM either of you or mention you, depending on the nuances of that platform, if I have a fleeting thought about you. And I think what that means is there isn't a lot of time that we can put into this. So that's why I think hurt people, hurt people can be true, but it's not always an official diagnosis. Because I've listened to many guests who weren't hurting, people who were just like, "You annoyed

me and I wanted to message you. I honestly didn't think you were ever going to see it."

Aza Raskin: Yeah, when I hear hurt people, hurt people, there's almost a consequentialist view or stance that can take. Yeah. And a mantra that we often return to on Your Undivided Attention is that awareness brings the opportunity for choice. And that if you're aware of that pattern, that lets you transcend it and very much agree with what you're saying that social media or online environments are tuned for us to be as trigger happy as possible maximizing engagement, get the back and forth. It is robbing us in a way or taking away our ability to have that pause reflection space, to be aware and to choose.

Aza Raskin: One of the things I think you do really well is that you find common ground with the people that you're talking to, the people that hate. You are both bullied in high school and all of a sudden you can connect and you're connecting over him feeling like an outsider and your experience of being an outsider in different ways connect to, and we're thinking, imagine if Twitter, as it detects you're typing something hateful or angry, reactive, it scans your Twitter profile. It scans their Twitter profile and it finds all the places where you've liked the same thing or expressed a same interest. And it shows you actually, how similar you are before you begin your attack, just curious how you'd respond.

Dylan Marron: God, I mean, that would be great. I also think that common ground is a lovely thing when it happens, but I don't think it's necessary to connect with someone. Sometimes or rather it is, but I think we need to expand what we even define as common ground, because sometimes I'll say that the only common ground that I have with someone is that we agreed to be on the same phone call at the same time. And sometimes we have no disagreement, but I can still acknowledge that they're a human being and they're still acknowledging that I'm a human being and we can still...

Dylan Marron: I believe that curiosity can be common ground too. And so if I'm curious about you and you are curious about me, a crucial thing, that curiosity, can't just go one way. Then I think that something really profound can happen even if there's nothing that you disagree on. I love finding common ground with people when it's there, I don't think that's a prerequisite for success in a conversation. So if there were that tool that was able to do that, I think that would be amazing. And I think it would perhaps train us away from this bad habit of finding community with people who hate a thing that we hate. And instead finding community with people who love a thing that we love.

Aza Raskin: That was actually my first thought in thinking about your idea is that well great. So now it'll find all the shared pile ons where we both piled on hate on the same people. Oh, look, you don't dislike each other, you just hate the same people.

Dylan Marron: Completely.

Tristan Harris: Right? Well, I mean, and that's why we have to look at the systemic nature of the game. As you said, it is the hate game. You are paid and more likes and followers. The more clever you are at out grouping your fellow human being and the better and more clever and cynical and snarky you are, you get paid in more likes and followers. And I heard multiple people on your podcast reflect on this. There's a self-awareness, especially later, as people talk about it on retrospect. But I think what he is looking for is, okay, so we know the dynamics of this machine, everybody knows the outrage machine sorting for the fault lines of society, making it a super efficient to see every inflammatory fault line. At once fault line for profit machine equals dooms scrolling for profit machine equals bad mental health for profit machine.

Tristan Harris: And what we're interested in though is, okay, how would you systemically turn this thing around into something that doesn't reward that thing. You are identifying these, microprocesses between people just at a human scale one at a time. And when you and I were at Ted last week in Vancouver, you were talking about how you're swimming upstream. And that there's this huge force of gravity that's pulling in the opposite direction. And I think Aza bringing up this idea of like, "Okay, let's start thinking about it." What would a computational non-violent communication look like? I was like, "I don't know, let's see. What if we could find things where people have some shared background reference." I just want to mention quickly the work of Arturo Bahar at Facebook, back in the early 2009, 2010 days, there was a team at Facebook called the Compassion Team when teenagers would tag another person in a photo and say how bad they are or how awful... They're harassing someone by tagging them in a photo.

Tristan Harris: And if you wanted to be untagged, when teenagers try to message someone else to be untagged from a photo, they would often be unsuccessful. And so what they created was this report photo button that then led to a flow that they designed to start with a nonviolent communication practice. So first it would say, "How did this photo make you feel?" And the person would literally select like, "Oh, it made me feel sad, made me feel angry, made me feel embarrassed or ashamed. And then it would construct a message to the person who posted the photo that was harassing.

Tristan Harris: That started with the feeling of that your photo made me feel this way. And it helped augment for a more successful outcome of the person taking down that photo because they're basing it on these principles. I think what Aza's getting at with that example of Twitter is, "Hey, what if we were to take the places where we have common ground or common curiosity or common openness, and how do we just highlight that?" What would it look like to sort of put you out of the job where actually you're not needed to do the thing you're doing anymore because Twitter is automatically healing every fault line. So, instead of a fault line for profit machine, it's a bridge for profit machine. It's a healing for profit machine. What would that look like from your perspective?

Dylan Marron: I just have to start with a visual metaphor. There's this golf range here in New York city at a place called Chelsea Piers. And I don't know if you're familiar with it. Basically, it's a multi-story building, there's an entire wall missing. You go into your little pod and you golf. And the golf ball hits a net, probably a few 100 feet away. So you feel like you're golfing, but a lot of people can golf on top of each other. And the box creates these blinders, you don't see who's beneath you. You don't see who's next to you. You don't see who's above you. So you have no idea how many people are golfing at that time. That to me is the psychology behind a pile on.

Dylan Marron: A lot of times when people join a pile on, I know this sounds wild, but it's not necessarily out of malice. It's out of lack of awareness of how many other people are saying this thing, because sometimes it's helpful to offer support to someone who needs help. It just the tides shift so quickly where suddenly someone is being piled onto way more than they deserved. And so if we want to talk about implementation, I would say one very helpful tool would be a form of awareness of how many other people are in this conversation. I question that too, because then part of the allure of joining a pylon is to increase the ratio. So I don't know.

Dylan Marron: Tristan, I was telling you that I feel like I'm so on the micro that I think why I'm so interested in your work and the whole Center for Humane Tech is I've been so focused on relating on the micro. I've been so focused on creating a breakout room from the internet that in terms of implementation, it's like, God, yeah is it pile ons? Is it creating a way that you can tell how many people are on this? Is there a way to cap a pile on before it gets too big? This is honestly a question to you guys, but would there be a way to make people aware of that?

Aza Raskin: Well, so I have two follow up there and one is just, there's a certain naivety to this specific implementation that I had recommended. So to give an example of something that would completely slip through riddle, what do the most avid maskers and the most avid anti-vaxxers share in common? They both just want the pandemic to be over, they want to return to their lives. And that little sorting thing that I was doing like, "Let's find similar tweets," would never find that deeper value that unites them. And so it makes me wonder, this is a prompt really, to all of our listeners is from a technology side, is there a way of highlighting, the shared underlying values, not just the little bits and drabs that people post. So, that's one.

Aza Raskin: And the second is Francis Hogans, the Facebook whistleblower disclosures. One of the things that the Facebook integrity team discovered was that there was one simple thing that they could do that would do more to fight disinformation and hateful content, all the worst stuff than the billions of dollars that they spend. And that is limit the number of re-shares to two. That is there's a button when I reshare, there's a button when you reshare me after that it goes away.

You can still copy and paste to share. And the insight is of course, that if something goes viral, it's likely to be a virus.

Aza Raskin: So it would be easy to start implementing sort of viral limits. And now this is why I want to turn it back to you. You're a creator who's life led, and in fact, the reason why you sort of came up into popular consciousness is the fact that your work went viral. And I'm curious how you would grapple with these sort of two truths at the same time.

Dylan Marron: Yeah. The share button is interesting. I heard that episode that you guys had with her. And I don't think I ever thought of the share button in the way that she... It just launched into the philosophy of the share button. As a creator, I only ever liked the share button because it just meant more people getting to see my work. That is what word of mouth looks like in the digital sphere.

Dylan Marron: At the same time, I hear you and I think there was something interesting that she also brought up in your conversation, which was that she was talking about, you have to click on a link before it's shared, right. So that gets at this bigger question of knowledge of what you're sharing when you share it. So you're not just sharing it based on the headline.

Aza Raskin: In fact, in one of your episodes, I remember one of the people who was hating on another person was hating on them from an article, I think it was about detransitioning. And how they wrote an article about it and then they got this hate from someone who hadn't even read the article. And then you were talking about, well, I just wanted to mention that because it's how often, even in the cases where you're talking about where someone's actually really hateful and you're inviting them onto a show that the hate came from place where they hadn't even read the article. And I think in that episode, this person had empathy for anyone who was ever in the future ever underneath the bottom of pile on, because you just know that so much of it is based on people not knowing the situation at all.

Dylan Marron: I think so, because I think to be at the receiving end of a mass shaming, which I think is important to distinguish from hate, I'm beginning to articulate five years into this project. Shame is different from hate. The hate I was receiving that was homophobic, that doesn't threaten my position in my tribe. When I share a piece of homophobic hate that is, look at what I'm dealing with. My work is so big now that I'm getting homophobic hate. And I don't want to downplay it at all. It sucked. And there are people who don't have big platforms who get that and who get that every day. But getting homophobic hate is different from being at the bottom of a pile on from like-minded people who are piling onto you for not being the right kind of version of the like-minded person they wanted you to be.

Dylan Marron: And that is the scariest because it threatens your position in your tribe. And I think that happens a lot. I think, listen, let's give empathy to the people who do that. I think it's super important when we talk about this, that it's not some disgusting, stupid human who shares an article without reading it. I've done that before, so maybe I'm disgusting and stupid, or it's the fact that we are dealing with such an onslaught of information all the time. And so many prompts are telling us, belong by sharing this belong by saying this, that oftentimes we're just going to be like, "Great. This person is saying it, this person is co-signing, it I'm going to reshare it." That's of course dangerous because then you trade nuance for simplicity and you lose anything that might have been said by simply taking the word of an influential person in your sphere.

Dylan Marron: I just wanted to say you hit on something that I think about a lot with cancel culture. And I know that term means something different to so many people, so I call it shame culture, just so it's de-stigmatized in people's minds. But I think about that with shame culture a lot because when you get into the nitty gritty of all of these stories of shamings through the so-called canceled people, you actually find that usually the story is so complicated. You're like, "Oh, she said this thing." Sorry, wait, can you just explain to me why that was offensive? Okay. Now you've explained to me why that was offensive and who did she offend with that? Okay. So she offended this person."

Dylan Marron: And so there are so many layers to the story that you just understandably are like, "I do not have time for this. I don't want to get into this. So just tell me, is she racist? Is she transphobic? Okay, great. Done. That's all I need to know. That's what I'm going to plus one," because you are understandably not on the side of racism, not on the side of transphobia. And so it's like this really dangerous mix of our lack of time that we have our lack of space to engage in a complicated story and how many stories we're getting thrown at us all the time that we just want to engage in the shorthand. And often the shorthand doesn't do justice to the nuances of the story.

Aza Raskin: I think there's even another dynamic going on, which sort of preconditions all of us towards this reactivity and seeing the worst or the simplest version of other people's stories. And that is we all walk around the world with some kind of trauma. And on social media, whatever the worst thing you've ever clicked on becomes your world. So if you're Asian American and you're scrolling online and you see a video of somebody harassing an Asian American, you're probably going to look at that, click on it, respond to it. And what does Twitter do? It shows you more of those things. And so you start to see an infinite feed of examples of the thing that retraumatizes you. And that's not just true for Asian Americans, this is true for every different type of trauma.

Aza Raskin: So this is a kind of trauma inflation. All of society is getting sort of inflamed because we're being shown the worst thing we've ever clicked on, unique to each one of us, that thing that'll activate. And then it's even worse because

we're coming from two different realities. I have seen the thing that traumatizes me over and over again, but you haven't seen it because you've been clicking on other things. So when I start talking about it being, this is the worst thing. I have an infinite amount of first person experience showing me that this thing is happening. And you're like, "You're clearly an idiot because I've lived around the world and I'm getting this other thing, so I can't trust your reality." And now we end up in this increasingly schism fractioned, global psychosis.

Tristan Harris: And that's also in the left and the right. The right accuses the left of being oversensitive to homophobia, racism or whatever. And first of all, those things exist. And then second is if you click on some of those things and you get this infinite reinforcement, you get this such a huge sort of overwhelming evidence of this thing that to be true. And you're also traumatized by it. So then when this person says that's not a real issue or you're overreacting, because they haven't seen that in their feed or they just think that you're overreacting, it's even more offensive that they would even question it. But similarly on the right, when you're like, "Oh, people on the right are never harassed by people on the left." Because you haven't seen those examples of where there's people on the right.

Tristan Harris: See infinite examples of people on the right who get harassed violently by people on the left at flipping tables and BLM rights or whatever the thing is. And so I think that it's so critical that Aza said that there's two pieces of that. The first is that trauma inflation, the second is the deflation of empathy. So we have one line that's going up where we are tighter, tighter trigger. And the second is that we have less and less empathy or a reality check that thing is even happening for that other person.

Tristan Harris: And that's why I think we haven't even appraised of this mass looting trance, this spell that we have all been under. And until we can name collectively and hold that and stabilize an awareness of that thing, that trauma inflation empathy, deflation is one of many effects that we've been highlighting on this show and broadly. I just think we can't get out of this. We need immune system for these effects.

Dylan Marron: I sound like I'm beating one single drum, but the best way I know how to do this is to bring people into conversation with each other. This is one of those things. That's funny. When I spoke at Ted in 2018, the day after I spoke, someone was like, "Have you thought about how you're going to scale this up?" And it's the most tech based question and there are of course fantasies, but the only way to scale this up is simply to have conversations and for more people to have conversations. And that doesn't mean that I never stop producing episodes. That just means that we need to create more of that. And I say that because it sounds like this incredibly simple thing.

Dylan Marron: But Tristan, I completely agree with you that there is this dearth of empathy because we are all seeing different things and we don't see what someone else

is seeing. And what is true for us is not necessarily true for someone else. And we feel offended when they negate our truth. And of course we do when someone negates our truth, that's an offensive thing. When someone is saying what you experience isn't real, that hurts. When you bring people into conversation with each other, it's a blossoming of empathy and the empathy, this is not something you have to try for. It is a natural byproduct of conversation. So I think the more breakout rooms that we can create for people to connect with each other... In addition to all of the amazing tools that you guys are dreaming up and scheming, and then actually implementing and asking people to implement, it's not one or the other, it's both. I think something I wanted to bring to you guys is the tagline I say at the end of every episode is remember there's a human on the other side of the screen.

Dylan Marron: And of course the complicated thing is that goes both ways. That is of course for the person who's about to send the negative thing. The recipient of your negative message is a human. They have feelings, you're going to hurt those feelings. And complicatedly the person who sent you that message is a human being, unless they're a bot, but of course there's a caveat. But the person who sent that message is a human being who had a reason for sending that to you, even if that's not a particularly compelling reason or one that you co-sign, that was a human being. What made that human being do that thing? And so the more ways we can infuse that idea into the public square, the more we can show, not mirrors, but windows of humanity to each other, the better.

Aza Raskin: Technology is always putting choices on life's menu, the interface, the icons, the colors, there's a like button, there's a retweet button, there's a react button. You can choose an emotion or emoji you want to add to that message that the person sent. There's a menu that is orchestrated by the technology and the screens that are put in front of us. And we're only as good as the choices that are on life's menu. And Dylan in your work. What I hear you doing is saying, "Hey, there's a missing choice from this menu. And it's the, why did you write that response?" Because that's the way that, as I understand it, you reach out to people is you ask, why did you write me that message? Am I phrasing that right?

Dylan Marron: Yeah. For the most part.

Aza Raskin: Well, and essentially and I also hear using the language of breakout rooms. There's no, "Hey, can I call you, can I have a one-on-one conversation with you?" That choice is not on life's menu as driven by the technology, you are adding that based on how you see the world and seeing there's a missing choice on life's menu. And in our work, what we're trying to do is get technologists to think about the way that they design, not just the algorithms, but the actual interfaces to say, what are the menus that would be most empowering for orchestrating and deepening the connections of the social fabric. And in your book, Conversations with People Who Hate Me, you have all these lessons that you have learned. I'm just curious if there's any other lessons that you think that we

should be thinking about that are missing from the menus being provided by technology.

Dylan Marron: One of the first questions I always ask my guests is to just tell me about themselves, not related to the comment that they're there to discuss. And that is one of the most beautiful disarming tools that you can give someone because giving someone the opportunity to define themselves on their own terms, in a space that they are bravely coming to own up to something that they've written or in a space that they're bravely coming to face the person who wrote the negative thing to them. Everyone wants to define themselves. Everyone wants to define themselves. That's one of the few generalizations I'm comfortable making. We like defining ourselves on our own terms, whether that means putting an American flag, emoji in your bio or your pronouns in your bio or the activism that you support. People want to plant their flag in the digital landscape and in the physical landscape too.

Dylan Marron: The biggest takeaway and I think the one that most people quote back to me maybe because it's illiterate, but perhaps because they resonate with it is this idea that empathy is not endorsement. This was actually a mantra I created for myself because I felt like I was walking this tight rope over a cultural canyon as I was empathizing with people who I really disagreed with. And this is something that my tribe says is not that cool. This was 2017 when this started, so resist was the word in the public square. And I wasn't sure if I was transgressing by not resisting well enough, but I found myself empathizing with my guests. I felt for them. And again, I said this earlier, but the empathy I felt for my guests was not something I tried for. It was a natural byproduct of speaking to someone.

Dylan Marron: And so I created the mantra, empathy as not endorsement for myself as a way to keep going as a way to say, push towards that, walk towards the empathy. And that doesn't mean I'm co-signing the most harmful ideologies. It just means I'm seeing someone as a human being.

Dylan Marron: Another thing that I took away and I share this in the book is that debate is a sport. A lot of people mistake my show for a debate show because I've said many times that it's not a debate show, but I think what that betrays is, debate is the only word we have for conversation across difference. So we only know that to engage with someone that we disagree with, we must fight them. But I don't think debate works. And I think debate can be a really amazing practice to sharpen talking points.

Dylan Marron: But it's really not about the beauty of listening. And so I always try and steer my conversations away from debate. And the other thing I think is relevant is something I encountered over and over again, which I started to call the makeover illusion. I think we are so diluted by thinking that change happens with a vicious clap back tweet. That change happens the nastier we are to someone, that change should happen fast that if we demand an apology from

someone we should get it as soon as we demand it. But change is this incredibly slow process that happens over time. It doesn't happen in the course of a single phone call. It just does not. It happens over time.

Dylan Marron: I was able to see that once in a two part episode series I did that someone who was really resistant in one episode, I spoke to him again four months later and he really changed his tune, but all we can ever hope for is to plant the seed in someone's mind the seed of a new consideration, the seed of a new idea. And we also have to release ourselves from thinking that we are the ones that have to water it too. We can plant a seed and we can say, "You got to tend to it because I'm not going to be able to walk with you through it." So I think avoiding debate, walking towards empathy and also accepting that change is a really long process that doesn't happen as instantaneously as we'd like to believe it does.

Aza Raskin: So Dylan, I'd love to know from you, what is one thing that that others don't that gives you hope?

Dylan Marron: Well, I can share it with you. Something that I see from my vantage point of also being the producer of this podcast, which is that 95% of people that I invite onto my show are incredibly resistant to engage in conversation and scared. And then the vast majority of them, I would almost hazard to say all of them at the end say that wasn't as bad as I thought it was. I was so nervous and my nerves faded away.

Dylan Marron: And I want to share that because I think we have a lot of tools at our disposal to mitigate awkwardness. We have a lot of tools at our disposal to distance ourselves from people. There is an app that I can log onto and I can get food in 15 minutes. You name it. The tech industry has created it so that I don't actually have to interact with someone. And so I think it's understandable that people are reticent to connect with each other because I don't think we're given as strong of tools to connect with each other, but conversation and connection is this thing that is understandably scary. And once you rip bandaid off, it's just not as terrifying.

Tristan Harris: Dylan Marron is the host and creator of Conversations with People Who Hate Me with the book of the same name. His Ted talk, empathy is not endorsement has been viewed over 3 and a half million times. Dylan is also the creator of various progressive theme videos, such as Every Single Word, a video series that edits down popular films to only feature the words spoken by people of color. In the words of Jason Sudeikis, Dylan Marron is a modern Mr. Rogers for the digital age.

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