

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Renée DiResta

JVN: Hey, curious people, I'm Jonathan Van Ness and welcome back to Getting Curious. Well, last time I checked it is 2024 which is an election year. We've covered this quite a bit on the podcast so far. But queens, I don't know if you remember our episode with Nadia Brashier from a few years ago on misinformation and disinformation. But the misinformation and disinformation continues to grow, continues to spiral. And I'm really concerned about social media algorithms and what roles they play in spreading misinformation. And I think really throwing our hands up and not engaging and just getting frustrated and walking away from the process I don't think is what's going to happen. But I'm also curious about like, has misinformation ever been this pervasive? So to talk about that, we're gonna be bringing in Renée DiResta. And we're asking, misinformation, disinformation and propaganda, what's the difference and how does it affect us and make sure to stick around to the end of the episode where we'll reflect on what we learned and if we answered the question, so uh stick around for that conversation. In the meantime: my heart and I know everyone else's heart is, like heavy and feeling powerless in such a gigantic system that is just- we're just seeing disarray everywhere. I need to do something to just feel like I can do something to help the suffering in Gaza. So I did a little research and I looked into the World Central Kitchen, which was established in 2023. But I've been reading up on them, they've been doing a lot of really good work in Gaza helping to make sure that people are fed. I've also been doing research and to Save the Children. They have been around for a little longer since 1953. That's actually a lot longer since 2023, but you get what I'm saying. they're doing really important, essential work in Gaza. So just before we get into that, I wanted to share those two resources as we support a cease fire now, and we also want peace in the region. It's really important that we say that there's no space for anti-semitism in this conversation. There's no place for Islamophobia in this conversation and we know that people are not their governments and we know that government's actions are not their people. That was just on my heart. And I felt that I needed to share those two resources with you guys this week. OK. Let's get to our guest bio Renée DiResta is the research manager at the Stanford Internet Observatory where she investigates the spread of malign narratives across social networks and assists policymakers in understanding and responding to the problem. She has advised Congress, the state department, and other academic, civic and business organizations and has studied disinformation and computational propaganda in the context of pseudoscience, conspiracies, terrorism, and state sponsored information warfare. Her latest book, "Invisible Rulers: The People Who Turn Lies Into Reality" out on June 11th. So we need your help. Renée also, how are you? Are you thriving today?

RENÉE DIRESTA: I'm good. I'm wonderful today.

JVN: You guys can't see this unless you like just so happen to see our like social content on this episode before listening. But Renée's got a really gorg orange headband today that I'm living for, side bar. I just think it's really cute. I also really want a headband today. So, and so just to go over a little Cliff's Notes on misinformation and disinformation just to get us up to speed. Can you tell me the difference between misinformation and disinformation again?

RENÉE DIRESTA: Yeah, most people use it the, the misinformation to mean something that's wrong, but unintentionally wrong and disinformation is something that is deliberately either wrong or it's put out by somebody who's not quite what they seem. So I think with misinformation, you're trying to use it to mean something that is actually false, right?

Something that can be disproven, something that actually isn't true. Whereas disinformation sometimes what you're talking about is like a campaign to make people believe a thing it's much more related to propaganda, right? The idea that you're trying to convince an audience of something and you might be doing that with, you know, false facts or you might just be doing it with like fake accounts or you're using a lot of bots or trying to boost something in authentically. So that's how we tend to divide those things. Misinformation - accidental, disinformation on purpose.

JVN: So how can we spot both misinformation and disinformation just when we're like, where does it exist and where, where do we need to be aware that we could be consuming it?

RENÉE DIRESTA: Yeah, so misinformation can be about anything, right? It's just somebody gets something wrong. They, they read something, they misinterpret it. There's a, there's a scientific study with complicated statistics, they don't really understand what they're reading. So they make a claim about it. I think that misinformation, you know, people usually share it because they genuinely care or they really believe they want to help their communities. What a lot of people use the term for though in this like kind of especially on social media is when they're talking about an opinion that they don't like, right or content that's like rage bait. So we're using the word, but we're not really using it in the way that, you know, we're, we're not really using it to describe the thing that people are actually upset about most of the time. So I think the one thing that you know, when you're, when you're asking a question, like, how do you spot it a lot of the time? You, you kind of believe it because it, it, it, kind of reinforces your pre-existing ideas, right? You don't like a particular group of people, you hear a claim about that particular group of people, maybe a political party that you don't like. And you're kind of inclined to believe it. You find yourself like, you know, you see something and you're like outraged. And so then you go and you share it yourself. That's the kind of dynamic that tends to happen with these things. And that's why I think misinformation when you're talking about something that's true or false, it's a, it's a good time to use the word. Otherwise, what you're really talking about is propaganda and rage bait.

JVN: So I think really what's gotten me so much is it it being queer and being gender queer on top of my sexuality is, I think I've always seen and noticed disinformation, especially when it comes to our community, but it does feel like there's just like a higher, like amount of this type of rage baiting sort of content. And I wonder if it's because, and I've hypothesized this on Getting Curious several times, but it's so, you know, excuse me, but we just got to do it. It's like, I think that it's because negative content speaks to like our fear and our brain, it's like your survival instinct. It's like that unknown thing or the really rage inducing thing that is like the snake that is the hippo that's going to trample you. Like that is the thing that's going to kill you. So you really notice it whereas when it's like something that's like, you know, a little fuzzy bunny, like a happy story about like someone doing something nice or accomplishing something that doesn't have the same amount of energy because it's not like a threat to anyone. So by playing off of that idea of threat to whatever is really good at getting people to click and engage because people are afraid. Is that, do you think that that's true?

RENÉE DIRESTA: I think that that's true. I think one way that that this really happens is um you know, what you're talking about is identity, right? So we've kind of hit a point particularly on social media where people engage around things that they feel like reinforce their identity and so much of that his culture or politics, right? And so regardless of what particular opinion

you may hold, what we see and you know, social science research kind of reinforces this like this sort of geeky academic stuff, basically says that people see arguments against their political beliefs as attacks on them personally also. So it puts them into a mindset of, oh, I have to fight with these people, right? I have to, you know, I have to defeat these people, these, these sort of like these enemies. And so what you start to see is people are all like, they're, they're kind of like waiting for it. They even go looking for it because it, it's, it's like, well, of course, this is what I do on the internet, right? I fight with my political enemies. This is what the internet is for. This is what Twitter is for. This is what Tik Tok's for. I'm gonna own my enemies today. And so you get people who go there looking for that, you know, looking for that content, basically, just finding ways to fight. And in addition to the ordinary people that do this, the sort of crowds of people you have the influencers and the influencers are particularly good at it and that's because there's incentives for them. This is, you know, they're making money off of it, their engagement goes up when they, you know, when they do these things that rile up their base. And so again, it's, um you know, I'm describing it in general terms because it's not a thing that's unique to one particular issue or one particular group or even one particular country. It's just the incentives of social media make it so that people engage like this and it really does intersect with what you're describing, right? That sort of psychological response to I am being attacked. There is something I should be afraid of here and that kind of fear response gets people off the fence and you know, and kind of into the melee.

JVN: Is there a link or like, what's the link between misinformation and then like, polarization across a whole broad group of people? And the only other thing I was going to say about that too is is that like, we also just did this fun episode on like local press and one really interesting thing in that episode that didn't occur to me at all is that as local newspapers have dwindled, that gave us practice in smaller groups of people coming to a common understanding of facts. And she used this example of recycling. She was like, if you ever want to see a small town, like fucking fight each other, tooth and nail, talk about redoing their recycling bins and you will see people just get so pissed about something that seems like not like as huge of, but it's like really intense, but it gives people the practice on like compromising and like coming to a consensus and we just don't, we have way less practice coming to a common consensus now, not only because of local papers, but I think maybe because of misinformation and like polarization because at least papers had to kind of back up what they were saying like a little bit or be like, this is an opinion, not fact. But what is the link between misinformation and polarization for like a community or like a whole country.

RENÉE DIRESTA: Yeah, there's a lot of, that's one of the things that's constantly debated in academia, it's like, you know, niche, niche fights and that's because it's really hard to say, like, this piece of information caused that belief. Right. Your, your beliefs are shaped, your identity is shaped by who you engage with, what you read, who you spend time with. Used to be much more geographically based like, you know, right. The people you're going to fight about your recycling bins with live like next door. Um you can be a real asshole in those debates if you want to, but then you have to see that guy every day, right? So there is like a, I think a, a grace that we, you know, um that we afford our neighbors perhaps when they're sort of in physical proximity to us and we don't have to do that online because they're just some random an no, right. You know, somebody on the other end of an avatar and we don't have to care how they feel about what we say or how we act because again, we're there to have the fight, right? That's the, the incentives like the norms are really now around. Like I am going to go to the internet like to brawl right now, I'm going to go to the internet to learn

something new and make a, you know, make a new friend or neighbor or whatever. Um So I think that with the polarization stuff, it's really hard to say like misinformation leads to polarization. I think one of the issues though is um when you have that very factionalized world and then you have people who they really tend to start to trust the media that speaks to them because it seems like them, right? And that's different than local news which had to speak to all of the people in the, in the geographical region, right? Whereas now again, if I am starting a substack, say, and I want to reach a particular group of people, the people who are going to pay me are the people who, you know, I I develop a sense of trust with. And one way I can do that is by saying like I'm just like you, right? As a member of group X, let me tell you about how we should think about this thing. And one thing that is really interesting is when you see actual proper disinformation campaigns and when I say that I'm usually referring to something where there is like, you know, a state actor involved, like let's Russia China, Iran, one of the things that happens is they pretend to be members of the community. That's how they're speaking to you as a fellow black person, we shouldn't vote for Hillary Clinton. It's not, you shouldn't, right. It's we shouldn't as a member of the shared identity, we should not do this thing. And so you see that reinforcement, that entrenchment and then they, and then they create the other, right? As American veterans, we are not receiving our benefits. Why are we having more immigrants come in? Right? And so there's that, there's that connection where first and foremost, what I'm emphasizing is like we're in this together, we're a shared group, you know, we have these shared beliefs and then also there's other people over there, you know, they're taking something away from us. And so there's that, that's the sort of thing where again, when you see actual literal state propagandists doing that work, that's the strategy that they're running. And it's because it is the ability to say like you trust me, I'm like you, those other people are over there and this is how, you know, this is, let me tell you about how the world is. We can't compromise with them because they're always trying to take something from us and you do see that again and like hyperpartisan political influencers do the same thing. Of course, they're not, you know, they're not fake. I'm not saying in any way that they're quote inauthentic, but the, the sort of um the accounts that are pretending to be something that they're not, are using that same type of rhetoric because it's very effective.

JVN: So are, are we just totally fucked? Like, is social media going to fuck us to hell or like, how can we be effective with our information.

RENÉE DIRESTA: One of the things I think about is like, you know, I have a very dry analytical way of communicating, right? It just, you know, here is my, here are the facts, here's how I understand them. I like to write, I hate being on video, you know, the thought of making Tik Toks like gives me anxiety. But one of the things, one of the reasons why I wrote the book in part was like, I feel like influencers have a role to play here, right? Like they set the norms, this is how you engage, this is how you criticize somebody. This is how you talk about somebody, right? Like you have a lot of people who are, who really look up to people who have massive followings of huge audiences because they see it as like, here's a person who's kind of like me has a lot of the same opinions as me and here's how they behave and it becomes in a sense like, like this is the avatar for what it means to be a good progressive or a good, you know, fill in the blank conservative or whatever. And so that, that, that idea of like norm setting is something I think a lot about, I just don't know, like, I don't feel like I personally have the power to do anything about that, you know. So the only thing I can do is decide like, how am I going to engage. Um, and I do feel like I have kind of hit a point where when I see something outrageous about, you know, a person or a politician, I don't like, like, I

actually do go try to, like, find more articles about it before I just hit the reshare button at this point, like the kind of like, pause before you post or whatever they say and um media literacy these days. But, but there is that, that question of like, how do you establish norms within your community? Again? It used to be so much geographical and then now back around 2015, the idea that, you know, you got attention and quote unquote won by like owning your enemies became the sort of norm for engaging on the internet and people grew massive followings because they were very good on, you know, good at dunking on people, right? That was their um that was the whole mo so I think that kind of shift does have to happen from, you know, from, from people who begin to realize that like, you know, I think a lot of influencers in particular start off thinking like, oh, I'm just posting my opinions to my friends. They don't see it as like a source of power, right? But it is, it is a source of power. And so think about how you use that power is something I wish we had more of.

JVN: Is the reality of what's playing out on Tik Tok at all, the reality that's playing out on the ground in the Middle East or even here in the United States, is there any way for us to know that is?

RENÉE DIRESTA: I think that is really the question, right? And, and um a lot of the stuff that so at Stanford Internet Observatory where I work, what we try to understand we're looking at um particularly breaking crises, right? So I remember on October 7th, you know, um immediately after it happened, we had all the telegram channels up, right? And this is, this is my job. We look at public data, um the telegram channels up, we're looking at what was happening on X and what you would see is content that would land on the telegram channels. You couldn't verify it really in the moment, but people would go and they would take it and they would move it over to X instantly, right? Because here is a sensational or horrific image boom. We're gonna put it over here and you know, for some of these like I would do reverse image search or something. And I'm like, OK, that came out of Syria like five years ago, right? But that person who has just shared that image is influential has a large following and it's already gone viral, right? Because everybody who's seen it is now outraged and horrified. Also, they've clicked the share button, they've participated in that process and like boom, we're off to the races. Maybe you're gonna get some community note that will eventually clarify that. No, this is an image from Syria, but that's gonna happen after it's had like 2 million views.

JVN: You know, and we know from Nadia Brashier's episode that when you get like when you first learn something like your brain always is going to think that that's like the default right thing, even if it was wrong, right?

RENÉE DIRESTA: Or you're not even going to see the the fact check. And this is, you know, Israel Gaza was a particularly emotionally like, you know, horrifying thing for many, many people. And the response similarly was an emotionally horrifying thing for many people. And so they did come to feel really invested in it, right? And so what can you do if you're like, you know, sitting here in the United States of America? Well, maybe your form of activism is boosting the things that you think show your enemies in the worst light or show the plight of your side or in different ways we can do that. Um But what you have to work with is not something that you have in any way, kind of personally verified. And so when you have generative AI that can produce an image that looks quite plausibly like a building blown up in a con in a conflict zone, right? And you can't reverse image search that because it is a unique image. It's not gonna show you that this was from Syria five years ago because it

literally doesn't exist, right? It's a world, it's a, it's unreality, right? It's, it's a thing that looks highly plausible and so you can go and share it and it's very hard to figure out if it's true or not. And so we're putting all of this onus on people, even when I say, like, you know, think before you share, right, that that does assume that you have so much time in which you're gonna actually go and take the time to do that, that you have tools that make that possible. Um And, and most people really don't. And then the other flip side that we saw with that ability to kind of create unreality is that unfortunately, you also saw people denying reality, that was quite real, right? So there were, for example, um images of babies, right, that were released um by the Israeli government in, in the days immediately following October 7th. And they were real but interestingly like, you know, right wing influencer, Ben Shapiro uh tweeted them and he got tagged by other right wing influencers who were like, no, no, no, I ran this through an A I checker and it tells me that it's A I generated. And so then all of a sudden you have this whole debate about whether like, you know, did the Israeli government fabricate images of dead babies and post them on X did Israel supporter Ben Shapiro, you know, run a propaganda campaign-

JVN: The whole like beheaded babies thing.

RENÉE DIRESTA: Yeah. And also that was very much caught up in the beheaded baby story which was such a like macabre thing to be talking about. But there was a journalist who reported a story saying that a person who was recovering bodies after the October 7th massacre said that there were 40 beheaded babies and 40 is a very, very, very specific number you will anchor to it, you will and it's also a very specific thing search for. So now all of a sudden when you're searching for 40 beheaded babies, that phrase, this is an opportune time for anybody who has produced content related to that very, very, very specific phrase is going to pop up. And again, what gradually comes out is there were some babies that had been murdered in various ways, right? And so you wind up in this, you know, this world where people are debating, is it 40 or not? 40 is the image real? Is the image not real? You know, it was, it was like one of the most bizarre media inquiries I've ever gotten was um you know, was like people wanting to talk about like that story and what it meant. And I just, you know, so -

JVN: Is that what happens at like the Stanford, like the Stanford Internet Observatory? So like you go to Stanford, is that where it is?

RENÉE DIRESTA: it is a Stanford. Yes.

JVN: Is it? It's like you go there and it's, is it basically just like a huge newsroom of like academics, like verifying stories?

RENÉE DIRESTA: No, we are not fact checkers. That's the funny thing. The, the media reaches out to us periodically try to try to understand like we are adamant that we are not fact checkers. It is not our job to tell you what is true or, but what we can tell you a lot of the time is where an image first appeared, right? And then what you'll see is somebody like BBC verify, for example, or the New York Times has a verification team. Ellen cat has a verification team. There are these people um I'll use BBC as an example because we, you know, we would occasionally talk to them about, you know, anti Ukraine videos on Tik Tok and what kind of networks were, were behind those. So what you would see is like here's where we first see this content here is how it's moved across the internet. Here is how this influencer wound up with it. So you can think about it a little bit more like kind of forensically

tracing how something went viral. Why did that thing come to be in your feed? That's the kind of work that when we are doing work on disinformation often that's what we're doing. So we're not making a value judgment about this is true or this is false. We rely on fact checkers and people who are doing that kind of authentication ourselves. Um, but what we can do is say here is how this became a trending topic on Twitter. Here is how this debate about the 40 dead babies unfolded across the various political factions on the internet.

JVN: Have we seen or has there been any, like, generative AI that's been proven like on online or on social is related to the Gaza war?

RENÉE DIRESTA: There's definitely, there's, there's stuff out there. Um, you can kind of, uh, you can Google for it is, um, media does write these stories sometimes past a point. We don't, we're very small team. We don't have the bandwidth to continually field a research project on a particular ongoing conflict. Usually at some point there are teams that are devoted to a conflict of research that will come in and do it. Um, you know, so we worked quite a bit on Ukraine in the sort of early days of February 2022. That's not, you know, that that's sort of a, um, a little bit less of a thing that we actively focus on now because there are so many other people who do it. But yeah, maybe I just trailed off.

JVN: No, you did. You totally did. That's just like, so interesting. So you guys are like, so a news org will come to you guys to, like, try, they're like, we have this story, like we need to figure out like where these images came from. And so you can kind of dissect like how a story played out and like-

RENÉE DIRESTA: Yeah.

JVN: That's fascinating.

RENÉE DIRESTA: So that's what we try to be and again, public data and, and quantitative analysis. So that's, that's what we focus on

JVN: interest. Let's go back to the book Invisible Rulers. So, so who are our modern day propagandists? It's me, who else are the invisible rulers?

RENÉE DIRESTA: So the term invisible rulers came from Edward Bernays who sometimes called the father of modern propaganda. And he wrote this book. So he was uh he worked on kind of selling World War One to the American public, right? And the word propaganda back in the 1920s was not yet a pejorative, right? So he's making this argument, the phrase he the the the sentence he says is like there are invisible rulers who control the destinies of millions, right? And then he talks about how we are governed by um And our tastes are formed by our ideas are suggested by men we've never even heard of. So you think that your opinion is being steered maybe by the media by the politician. But what's really happening is there are these incredible powerful people who are opinion form and opinion shapers who are actually steering the politician or speaking to the media. And that was where the idea of invisible rulers came from so I wanted to, I wanted to kind of like pull that phrase forward 100 years basically, right? Because I thought it was like such a captivating way to describe it, particularly because most of what Bernays is doing in the book, most of the case studies in the book are not about politics at all. They're about marketing, right? They're about, like, I want to sell cigarettes to women. How am I gonna do that? Well, I'm gonna call them like, oh, I just forgot the name, uh the specific phrase he used torches of freedom. You know, you are a liberated woman. If you are smoking, pick up your torch of

freedom, right? And so you see this um you see this model of influence as like we are gonna appeal to you as a member of a group and make you think that as a good member of a group, as a liberated woman, you should be a smoker and we're gonna create that demand over time and by appealing to your identity as a member of that group. And so this book is kind of a fascinating read again, 100 years in the future because what he's basically talking about are people who are incredibly influential and they just know how to reach and connect with an audience. And so influencers like the very term influencer didn't come out of politics came out of marketing, right? I know like you probably remember this, the um the idea of like, you can help, you know, you can help the gap sell its genes, right? You can help Nike sell their sneakers by because like, like, you know, you have like, you have like a certain aesthetic, like you're fun, your fans, like you, you can help a brand monetize. And so you actually see brands going to, you know, what became influencers trying to sell products to their fans, right? But it's, it's actually like a completely transactional thing in the early days. And gradually you see that kind of move into political influencers where instead of selling a pair of shoes, you're selling an ideology, right? You're selling like a, you're selling a topic to fight about, you're selling a cultural war opinion. Um And so the book really just asks, you know, what does it look like when the kind of people who are molding opinions, suggesting ideas shaping the discourse, right? Getting eyeballs on content, like what do we call them? How do we think about them? So I didn't intend propaganda to be like a pejorative at all. I was thinking about it more in the context of like how it was used in the 19 twenties, which is just like, you know, here we are, we're opinion shaping, that is the thing people do. And you know, and we're going to go ahead and do it. And so my uh my goal with the book was just to kind of ask that question, right. What happens when, when it's very self directed and you personally can, you know, earn quite a good living off of it.

JVN: Obviously things that happen on social media are stressful but, you know, is it a security threat? It depends on if something happens to you. But what security threats does this pose to people at large? Just the level of polarization that plays out on social media on so many different terms? I mean, I think about Charlottesville, um I think about times where people have lost their lives and protests and in all sorts of different ways, are we over concerned? Are we under concerned? Have we been here before? Like, what did you find from researching the book about, about where we are?

RENÉE DIRESTA: So one of the things that I point to quite a bit actually was this um this guy by the name of Father Coughlin?

JVN: Oh my God, Oh my God. On ultra. They talked about him on Ultra Rachel Maddow's podcast about that. Oh my God. It's about that senator from Minnesota who was like a fucking Nazi apologist who from inside the senate was like distributing like Nazi propaganda. He was basically working in cahoots with the Nazis to try to get us not to go into World War two. And then he ended up dying in this like weird plane crash. He was like one of the, he's like the only sitting senator to ever die in office and then after he died, like this book that got recovered from the plane, you have got to listen to Ultra Renee. You will shit your pants. It is so good. But Father Coughlin was part of, wasn't he like a radio guy from the thirties? And he just like had this huge like, and he, he was really giving you like Trumpy nationalist like he was giving, he was one of the, and he, it was like the most popular radio show of like that whole decade, wasn't it?

RENÉE DIRESTA: Yea, so he had about, at his peak, he had about 30 million listeners when the-

JVN: 30 million fucking 30 million. That is, that's huge by today's standards.

RENÉE DIRESTA: Right. Right. No, it's objectively, it's objectively huge. And um and I think the population in the US was like, maybe 100 and 20 million. At that point I had the um you can fact check me. It's in the book, the book was fact checked. Um But no, the uh what I thought was really interesting about him is you see, like this man of the moment, right? Radio is relatively new. He, if you can listen to some of the recordings, he's always talked about us having this like this deep baritone. He sounds, you know, he's a priest, he's a man of God, he's trusted, he's uh got this kind of hypnotic way of delivering his sermons. And what you see is he's an originally very much like a, a supporter of the poor. He was a populist in the sort of the way that, that populism is not in the proto populism of today, but in the actual populism where it means like kind of people who are trying to support the poor and try to create political policies that, that benefit the poor. Um And so you see him originally a supporter of FDR and then he kind of becomes like an avowed enemy of FDR. He feels like he's failed, he hasn't delivered for the people, but he in turn becomes big fan of Mussolini and Hitler. And so you see his radicalization happens and because he has this massive following, you see him really kind of like take those followers along for the ride and then you see the sort of oh shit moment, right? Where FDR doesn't want to intervene because of the first amendment, he doesn't want to be seen as, you know, stifling this critic of his, you see the broadcasters, you radio is licensed, right? So there is, you know, and you can think about it as kind of a parallel to, to social media in a sense, not a government license, but again, somebody is controlling who gets that slot. So they're trying to figure out like, how do we fact check him? He starts to say crazy things uh Cristal, right? Where Jewish homes and businesses were attacked, he says, oh, well, it was really the fault of the Jews, right? So you see that very kind of, you know, that rhetoric that you can hear echoes or, you know, you sort of see it again, a century into the future. And so I spent a bit of time, like, trying to explain that moment. Right. You see, you know, he's got a paramilitary organization that sort of supports him. He's, again, he's doing that thing where he's like, well, you know, violence is terrible, but also we need to fight for, you know, Catholics need to stand up and fight for their kind, right? And so you see that, that same kind of rhetoric is out there. Um You see the FBI going after these people,

JVN: they blow up like a weapons factory or something.

RENÉE DIRESTA: Yeah. So there's like a, so they begin to do these sort of street skirmishes. You know, there's a bunch of different kind of political actions that these groups that are nominally aligned with him. There's a question about how active he really is. Um, yeah, that sort of plausible deniability there. Sometimes he's supporting it, sometimes he's taking a couple of steps back. You see his supporters begin to protest as the broadcasters do begin to crack down on him and take him off the air, right? So they have this very dramatic set of, of events that's happening and, you know, you have media trying to figure out how to counter speak effectively and then you have ordinary like college professors that go and they create this educational curriculum called the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. And what I loved about it was they literally annotated his speeches with emoji, right? They, they like came up with this, like I, I when I opened up the archives, I was like, this is actually this is like kind of fucking incredible. I don't know. How did we forget this? But you have

these professors who, who begin to say, look, we're not going to try to fact check him. That's a waste of time. But let us explain why the rhetoric works right here is why you feel so emotionally enraptured by Father Coughlin. Here's the kind of rhetoric that's being used in this speech in this sentence in this like smear campaign against this enemy. And so they come up with all these little names like the glittering generality, right? And, and then they literally make an emoji, a diamond emoji for the glittering generality. And they take all the speeches and they begin to release them basically as pamphlets for the communities, for people to just share in their, you know, local like bowling club or whatever or, you know, as you sit around listening to the radio maybe. Um and they, they just kind of like drop the little diamond in the spots in the speech where he's using that technique. And so the point is almost like, why are we wasting our time playing whack a mole with fact checks when we could be teaching people to recognize the sort of tactics and tropes that propagandists use. And so I spent a bunch of time on this in the book, basically, just trying to like make that argument is, is this this sort of like a lost knowledge from the 19 thirties, like a better approach to responding than, you know, than, than playing fact checking games or, or screaming at somebody and trying to counter them by screaming at them is, is like exposing the tricks actually a much more effective way to do it,

JVN: Which is basically the glittering generality is like when you take like, w what is a glittering generality?

RENÉE DIRESTA: So they use it to mean um something where you can uh paint an entire, you know, paint an entire group

JVN: That like veteran thing was when, when, when you were saying like, oh, like as veterans, we're not getting our benefits and all these immigrants keep coming in and taking our things. So we want to be like, isn't that one where you're like blaming the woes of like the va on immigration?

RENÉE DIRESTA: Yeah. And I think there's also like, there's the grain of truth there, right? There are a lot of veterans who don't get their benefits. There are a lot of veterans who have extreme mental health struggles, struggles that are totally forgotten about, right? That are completely forgotten about. And so there is that like it, it has resonance because something about it is true, the kind of demonization, the particular scapegoat they point to is not necessarily the correct, you know, like that, that's where you start to get into the propaganda, right? The other thing is the, is the, is the problem, the scapegoating is the problem. But the argument that veterans aren't getting their benefits is in fact something that is objectively true, right? And so there is like that grain of truth that's there. And so it's very hard because then you have to, you know, respond by getting into a whole debate about it. Uh Well, you know, this stat, that stat, this other stat as opposed to saying, well, look, this is a generality, right? There's some nuance here, here's how we can think about that. Instead, you're much more likely to respond emotionally because the the generality appeals to you.

JVN: Which is like biological males are a threat to women. Sports. Well, you're damn right. They are because they fucking overfund the men and under fund the women and give like the women shittier training facilities. But it's like the trans women aren't even fucking men. So like, what are we talking about here, Sharon? You know. Um So, yeah, that is so interesting. That is so true. So, um it's an election year. Um And also I realized when I started this, I was so excited to talk about misinformation and disinformation. I never really asked a guiding question which it's like, are we fucked? Is misinformation more prevalent

than ever. So maybe that's like what it was in retrospect. So like in an election year which we are in, are we especially fucked? Is misinformation like more prevalent than ever? Like, do you have any recommendations for like how many, how much time a day should one spend on obtaining information?

RENÉE DIRESTA: Like, I think, look, the um one thing that, that I think, I think that um when I say ordinary people, I just meet people who aren't trying to be influencers, right? Who are not trying to make it a career? I don't think people realize how much influence they even have within their communities, right? And so thinking about your role is like what you're sharing and how you're getting information out there. It is really important. Are we fucked? I mean, you know, depends on who you ask. No, I wish I could be optimistic. I'm really not in a lot of ways on this front. And that's because one of the things, um one of the things that has persisted is like the belief that the 2020 election was stolen um has been really deeply entrenched and it's, it's not there, you know, when it's expressed by like a person who has heard it because their media has told them and their elected leaders have told them, I actually feel kind of bad for those people, right? They've been misled by people who know better, who are shamelessly using them for purposes of maximizing their political power. It's incredibly manipulative and it's been happening for four years now. Right. And so that is where I think the biggest, um, you know, the biggest challenge is actually going to be that people are really dug in. They've been hearing for four years that an election was stolen from them by those other people. Every single campaign speech reinforces that idea. It has no basis in reality. But no matter how many investigations there are into, you know, ballots, ballot integrity and voting machine integrity, no matter how many times it's like Dominion Sue Fox News gets an absolutely massive settlement and we still pretend that somehow there was like a bear there. You know, they don't full throated, repudiated and emphasize on their programs now. No, there was no evidence of that. So we are in two very, very kind of distinct realities about the basic legitimacy of American elections. And that's the thing that concerns me because it's one thing to disagree about, you know, trans policies, abortion policies, war policies, you name it. Well, at least acknowledging that an election is free and fair and we have hit a point where whatever direction it goes, my real concern is that people are going to be convinced that the winner is illegitimate. And I think that that's actually a foundational problem for American democracy in a way that all of the other kind of issue based debates are predicated on the idea that we get to fight those out at the ballot box. And if we then create the perception that the ballot box itself is not legitimate, that's where I think the um the real, like the real concern is so my own work, my own kind of focus for, for 2024 is actually trying to understand more of the narratives about election delegitimization, right? There's just, I am not gonna, you know, in 2020 we ran a project where we just looked at um false and misleading claims related to voting. We didn't pay attention to Hunter Bryan's laptop. We didn't pay attention to what candidate A said about candidate B we did not care about the broader kind of culture war, you know, issues of the day. The only thing we cared about was what you know, were there lies about the the procedures and kind of protocols of voting like these things that say vote on Wednesday, not on Tuesday or lie to you about when early voting ends? Things like that. And then were they working to delegitimize the election? And it was overwhelmingly the latter. It was so much delegitimization. And that's what I think um we really need to be focused on just as people who believe in democracy and want to see the American project continue,

JVN: Especially with like generative AI, it's like you could make I mean, you know, when Trump's always talking about like stuffing ballot boxes and like, you could just make videos of that sort of thing.

RENÉE DIRESTA: And that, that's where I think again, kind of going back to our chat about the, uh, you know, the sort of fog of unreality that, that we started to see play out in Ukraine and Gaza, right? These sort of very pivotal moments, I think you will see some of that play out during an election. And one thing that becomes a challenge is if you know, a fact checker or authenticator says, no, this isn't real. Um Then the response is gonna be, yeah, but you don't trust that fact checker, that's a mainstream media, fact checker or, you know, and uh and so you're, you know, I think that um that's one of the things that I think is, is gonna be challenging about generative AI it's gonna be, even if something is created and identified as created, there's going to be people who are going to continue to want to believe it. And that is where I think that that kind of divergence in reality is uh is really toxic.

JVN: Yeah, I need to like, make a note of this. Like what I'm curious about now because it's like that fucking Electoral college honey. Like what Biden won like those six or seven states by like 100 and 10 or something. I think Trump won those six or seven or whatever his coalition was by like a little bit less. But the difference in the popular vote is so big that, like, it just, it's crazy that like California and New York and like these states that, you know, have way more population just earth, like we're still ruled by this, like, antiquated fucking electoral college. It was like, literally meant to empower like rural fucking pe well, like, not even rural, like, people who had, they were participating in the transatlantic slave trade, like directly. Like that's, it was really about like the South and like making sure that lesser populated states didn't get like out like they wanted more power and so they fucking gave it to him and we're still paying the price.

RENÉE DIRESTA: I mean, it's definitely worth doing a podcast on American governance.

JVN: Yeah, you've got to -

RENÉE DIRESTA: You've got to do one on American governance.

JVN: OK! So you said something really important just a moment ago, which was, I think a lot of people don't or you said a lot of people don't even realize like the power that they have to combat misinformation in their own lives. And like with their own platform in their own communities makes you think about certain family members of mine who just like, don't fucking talk about anything because they're like, that doesn't affect me. So I'm just gonna like not fucking talk about it at all and actually I'm going to like, enable all these other fuckers um talking to you, you know who you are. Um You guys, I found out that like a friend of the friend of a friend of a family member who's actually closer than what I just said, literally had a fundraiser for fucking Casey DeSantis in my home fucking town. I've been in that house like fuck me with this empty coffee cup. Like I cannot handle these people. So anyway, is there a trusted source of information anymore? Or, or what man?

RENÉE DIRESTA: You know that I think um besides

JVN: me, I know everyone, I'm I am.

RENÉE DIRESTA: No, no, no, no. That, that's really the, that's really the question, right? That's one of the things that you see. And I write about, I have a whole chapter in the book on COVID and I was like, oh boy, we're gonna, we're gonna go poke that there. But because

I think that you can again hold two ideas in your head, which was institutions at times fucked up, especially from a communication standpoint. And also there are people who profit from and maximize their own clout based on undermining confidence in institutions. So both of these things are true. And one of the things that's become a challenge is you do have this like kind of um you know, this, this fracturing along tribal and identity based lines and what you see happen there is like you can just dismiss a media outlet because they're not trustworthy. I have tended to you know, try to default to like, ok, what can I get from Associated Press? You know, what can I get? Like, where are the areas where the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times and, you know, reason and Mother Jones all kind of have the same body of facts, you know, is there at least some, maybe they're, they're gonna spin it differently. But like, where are the facts in that, in that kind of um that rubric? And so, um and then I think about like, if I want to share to somebody like a family member or a friend or someone where like we're just not aligned on an issue. And I think that they have that information, um which outlet are they going to be most receptive to? And how can I find a way to, um, you know, to, to present something palatable? I don't know if that's the right answer. That's, that's how I have started doing it. Um But another way you can do it is like you can see somebody post something or share something and you can send them ad m right? You don't have to necessarily like, blow them up in the public comments, you know.

JVN: So it's if you have a huge disagreement with someone over something as complicated as the Middle East or as easy as your recycling, but it really depends on you having like a shared set of facts, but both people don't have a shared set of facts or haven't even done enough research to really, really understand the history and what we're talking about. Like, is it worth a conversation if someone's really into propaganda? Are you not the right person to have that talk with them? Can we come to consensus? And is there any, like, personal policies that could make an impact on how we could be better at that?

RENÉE DIRESTA: I have tried to do? You know, I have, um, I have friends, you know, I, I think across the political spectrum I had a fellowship in 2017. Right. And it was, um, it was the Bush and Clinton foundations, the LBJ Foundation and Bush too. So, it was like, half Democrats, half Republicans. And, um, and I really liked it because, uh, this is back in 2017, I felt like it was at a time when polarization felt like it was getting worse and all of a sudden I had, like, these 50 people that I saw, um, once a month and then talked to on the internet for this sort of fellowship program for six months. And I felt like I came away with such a, um, a group of people where my experience was that we were always engaging in good faith. That was the, that was the baseline. Right. You know, and I just felt like, and, you know, we're still friends, um, you know, since God six years later, um, very, very close. They're like a second family and what I love about it was that it was this way to think about. Um, you're not gonna always agree. You're gonna, you're gonna have your fights. We don't have to have them in full public view. We can have conversations privately. Um, for me, I, that's how I've chosen to be most of the time on social media. Like, look, there are a couple of, of areas where I do feel like I'm going to get in there and I'm gonna fight right there are like, you know, I have three kids and education policy is really important to me. Vaccine policy is really important to me in certain areas where I'm like, OK, this is where like I will let it all, you know. But like are there ways to do it without being um without like smearing people, right? Without making somebody into a caricature? And I know what that feels like because it happens to me quite a bit too, right? And it feels bad. Um More importantly, I imagine you have this feeling you, it feels like you can't fight back, right? And so you're always gonna see like that one negative person, that one asshole who's like in your mention, smearing you as a thing, you feel

almost like you, you have to respond. Those are the moments where I'm like, you know, I actually don't unless I feel like I might be able to speak to the bystanders where like it's worth responding for the sake of the bystanders, then sometimes I'll do it. But otherwise I don't feel that I necessarily, it's not my job to have that fight with that person in that moment. Um I, if I don't feel like it's a, a good faith encounter. Like again, I said, I feel like I have this community of people where I do feel like I understand like a good faith discussion can leave you feeling closer to the person afterwards, it can leave you feeling more informed. Maybe you didn't come to an agreement, maybe you would agree to disagree, but you have that, that, you know, that, that sense that you've come away, like as humans who have had a conversation as opposed to wasting your time, um just being like shit on by some Rando who's just going to go off and do it to the next person.

JVN: Which is like, even if they are trying to do it in good faith on social, it is really hard because it's like you see the text and whatever mood you're kind of in.

RENÉE DIRESTA: Exactly however you choose to read it in your emotions and your feelings in that moment. Yes.

JVN: It's just not an easy place to feel like you've had a conversation and come up closer with someone when it's through text only and you've never met them.

RENÉE DIRESTA: Right. Right. And I think I've had, I mean, you probably even had this with your friends, right? You get a text and you, like, feel like they're being snippy maybe and you're like, offended by it. And, um, and then, you know, I had this happen with a friend of mine and I actually was like, ok, I value this relationship. Let me call her, actually ring her phone, which is not a thing I normally do, you know. Um, and, you know, and I, and I felt really glad that I had made that choice, right? It was a complete misunderstanding. I had read the situation wrong. It was, you know, um, she did not realize that I was far more upset about the issue that she'd kind of, you know, made a comment about than I was. And it was a, again a, a relation like a, um a moment of connection between two people. I think social media, we're not necessarily equipped to be broadcasting at all times, receiving feedback at all times. Everything you ever do is forever. I'm sure, you know, you might think it's fleeting but someone has screenshotted it and they will be there, you know. You know, and then you live in, in, like, in fear and self censorship about, you know, the like, what is the i if you do this? But I, I definitely, when I'm speaking about some contentious political issue or even things that shouldn't be contentious like me saying the 2020 election was not stolen where I'm like, I'm speaking and I'm like, I'm like, interpret like, what is the worst faith interpretation of this sentence? How circle and taken out of context?

JVN: I fucking make a declarative sentence.

RENÉE DIRESTA: Like it's like who is going to object to this? Let me filter this as I'm speaking. I feel like it's something where for me doing um you know, working on this stuff over the last like seven years. I um you know, it's like, it's a weird, weird skill to develop, right?

JVN: Is there any like pool it like when we were talking about Father Coughlin and like the censorship and first amendment stuff, like, is there any policies around, I mean, tiktok getting banned?

RENÉE DIRESTA: That that is a Yeah, I mean, are there any policies I think if you mean like social media policy, sorry, I kind of cut you off there.

JVN: Yeah, misinformation, disinformation like is someone trying because you could really think that like, because really one thing that Nadia taught us back in our first episode about misinformation and disinformation that I didn't want to hear, she's like, you know, both sides kind of do it. And then my whole takeaway is like a fucking leftist as I was like, yeah, but when we do it, it's like to try to protect more people. Whereas I feel like when people on the right do it, it's like typically the policy harms more people than what it's trying to protect, which I feel like is kind of a significant distinction to make, um, where, you know, we didn't, like, really end up getting there. She was just, I was like, I don't know, because even with like, vaccines or like, or abortion or like, it's, you're hurting more people than, but then it's like, also hard because there's always like a flip side to that where we're protecting women's sports. But it's like, honey, it's just such a conversation. Um, So, but is there like, is there like a chill or like a a move to chill free speech? I mean, I think even just like on social how like meta made it so that you couldn't like I did this abortion, this video about abortion a few weeks ago that literally got like so many likes and it, it went really high engaged, it got up to like a million views, but it had like really low shares and most of the time if I had something that got to that many people and got that many likes, the shares would be like off the charts. But I could see how this new policy of like no political stuff. It's impacting my algorithm on Instagram a lot like my podcast platform and my regular one because I do talk about political things and I can see the way that it doesn't reach the same people in the metadata. So it just kind of encourages you to like talk about hair and like shake your ass because like-

RENÉE DIRESTA: You know, that is a really great question. So content moderation, nobody is ever happy. Every single group feels that the algorithm is out to get them. I can tell you that most of the time it is conservatives telling me that the algorithm has been out to get them. I used to talk to people about it or I used to engage but I'm, I'm really not on Twitter much anymore. I don't, I don't enjoy it. I, I find it. Yeah, we got off too and yeah. Um but I am enjoying like threads and massive amount of blue sky and you know, I like, I like text based stuff. I don't make image content much. Um But where was I going with this? Oh Right. The moderation. So I used to periodically ping people on like I would see people on Twitter, we would argue about shadow banning, right? This, this idea that the algorithm is suppressing you. And one thing that I always found very interesting was that a lot of the people who were most riled up about it, particularly in like 2017, they heard Trump and influencers talking about being shadow banned by which they meant a platform had put a label on their content. It had been down rd, they, you know, it had been in some extreme cases, blocked from sharing in the most extreme cases, of course, they actually take it down. Um But you would see ordinary people talking about how shadow band they were. And I thought like this is such a um this is such an interesting perception. Like, why do you think that is like, what, what, what, what evidence, like, why do you feel that, that this is a thing like, you know, you're scrolling their page, they've got no labels on their tweets. It's just sort of like replying to people, but they're convinced they're shadow band anyway. And repeatedly, the answer that I got from these engagements was my friends don't see all of my content, right? And so they were absolutely convinced that like that because the people who followed them didn't see all their posts. That was evidence that there was like some sort of viewpoint based suppression that was going on. What the reality is, the platform decides like the algorithm is the king maker. Basically, I spent a whole bunch of time on this on the book in the context of like a case study on the Facebook watch tab because we have visibility into a tool called

crab tangle. Crowd Tangle gives us visibility into what's happening on the platform. It's a researcher access tool. Uh again, public post, public data, but I started paying attention. Remember for a while there were these like weird videos of like women mixing ice cream in a toilet or making like Spaghettios on the counter. It was these like gross weird food videos that really had this moment constantly pushed into your feed. So I was like, OK, this is very interesting. So I start looking into, I, I was actually talking to a friend of mine who is a youtuber with like, you know, tens of millions of, of followers. And he was telling me he was seeing them also. He's like, what's up with this on, on Facebook? And we were, we were talking about it. And I was like, man, this is interesting because he's pretty different from me. He lives in a totally different part of the country. You know, why are we seeing the same thing? So I start looking at it and these accounts actually don't have many followers at all. A lot of them have very, very small follower number, but the algorithm is just pushing it out, pushing it out, pushing it out. And what you see in the comments is like they managed to create content that has like a sensational Clickbait headline. It is a weird thing. People are watching it and sort of like a sick fascination, like they're grossed out by it. But, you know, you can't look away. It's like a, it's like a train wreck. Um And this is the thing that the algorithm is like boosting, boosting, boosting, boosting, you see billions of views on this content network. And then all of a sudden the algorithm changes and the views go they just absolutely crater and it's like a vertical cliff, right and that's because somebody, you know, some either team or whomever is responsible for looking at the Facebook metrics maybe realizes that the comments are not very favorable. The comments are like, why is this gross shit in my feed again? Right. So there's engagement but it's not like positive. Um And so what you start to see is like the algorithm gives and takes away. And it's got in this particular case, what I liked about this case study was that there was nothing remotely political about this content at all. It was purely a like we have decided that this is not it for us anymore, this is not it for our users. And so boom there it is, it's done, right? And you see then this network um over the next six months trying to climb back up to to get back to it, you count. But the reason I use this example is like the platform is all like there is no neutral, they are always out there trying to decide what to show you and your followers and everybody else. And it's oftentimes like they're trying to balance things that are explicitly harmful, right? And illegal, then things that are highly offensive and inflammatory. And there's these different tiers that they have and particularly on things that are offensive and inflammatory. Different people have different points of view on what is offensive and what is inflammatory. And so they're out there like kind of you know, tweaking these, these levers behind the scenes and the ultimate impact actually is that everybody feels angry and disgusted and irritated at moderators. Um But the only real solution to this I would argue is like giving users more direct control over their experience, right? Where when they have chosen to follow somebody that is treated as a very strong signal and then that content is pushed to them, right? That they see a lot more of it. The flip side of that though is you are basically saying if people choose to follow like, you know, heinous people, right? The phrase that we use sometimes is like lawful but awful content. Um Then that is what they are going to see too, right? So as you, as you make these determinations for what should be surfaced, what should be amplified, what should be Deb boosted? It's actually a very, very complicated series of questions because it has to work for the entire system. So that becomes the problem, right? So somebody who is like a good person creating content that they feel is like in the, you know, in the interests of bettering humanity and helping people, um ultimately is going to be subject to the same rule as people who are rage baiting or doing other things. If you decide to say like if you follow somebody, you should see all their posts.

JVN: So we're nearing our end. But I just want to ask this your book, "Invisible Rulers: The People Who Turn Lies Into Reality" you've already given us like a little tiddly peek into like what you cover. But is there any like people who you cover or things that you cover that you were like, particularly surprised about or want to leave us with like a little breadcrumb for people to get the book and read it.

RENÉE DIRESTA: Yeah, I mean, you know, it, I talk a lot actually, it became a memoir which was not what I was expecting. I set out like I said to write this book about what is propaganda look like in the modern era, right? And how do, how do I just like, what are the interesting thorny questions there? How do I delve into them? And then what wound up happening was that, you know, congressmen started smearing my colleagues and I, we got subpoenaed Jim Jordan, subpoenaed me, right? You know, you wind up getting hauled in front of Congress because we did work on the 2020 election. And I thought like, wow, this is really fascinating.

JVN: So you just, so you talk all about getting subpoenaed by Jim Jordan in the book?

RENÉE DIRESTA: Yeah. So I talk about what happens when like when I became all of a sudden, the, you know, me and my colleagues became the the subject of like a, you know, a vast propaganda campaign to spin our work in certain ways and like what that was like? Um because again, you feel like, oh my gosh, how do I, how do I correct the record? And then you realize that some, some groups of people just don't give a shit about facts and they, so it was like, internalizing that in a very, very personal level. And so, you know, the book really again, started off as this like kind of a provocative um you know, investigation into political influence or culture. And then Bam turned into like, oh, hey, now I'm a character.

JVN: You guys, if that's not like a reason to fucking run out and get this book, we have to read about that experience. Um Renee, thank you so much for your time. Thank you for coming and getting here. Thank you for writing this incredible book. And thanks for doing this hard ass thorny nuanced work queen. We appreciate you, we salute you and thank you so much for coming on the show.

RENÉE DIRESTA: Thank you so much for having me.

JVN: Did we learn the thing? Well, we absolutely did. And then I also have a lot more questions. So misinformation, that's when something is wrong, accidentally, disinformation is intentionally untrue and is much more related to propaganda. I also thought really interesting here. Like propaganda is really like informa it's information that's spread by someone who has like a political agenda. Um which is why like, honey, I'm part of the gay agenda, which is like keeping queers alive and having like good access to like economic security and like safety and housing and like being able to be ok. Uh and thriving. Uh So that's really what our gau end is. It's not that scary. Uh The other, I took a lot of interesting things away from this conversation. One of them is which like, we really got to read Renee's book because getting subpoenaed by Jim Jordan sounds like something that would not be very fun. And I think that we need to listen to this. We really get involved in things that we think has a direct impact on our lives. And when we don't think that those things have a direct impact on our lives, we just don't concern ourselves. And I don't know if that's for everyone, but I just thought that that was interesting. Um the ways that people take some information and run away with it on tiktok or just on social media, it is so dehumanizing and so absolute and like it was the good faith part when Ring was like, if people are really engaging in these

conversations in good faith and I think especially on tiktok, we just see people are not engaging these conversations in good faith, they are rage baiting, they are click baiting and they are painting themselves as like the arbiter of morality. And I think no one is really, I mean, I think really if we were really to look at what people are actually doing, it's like, it's just, I don't know, I just think that was, it's really interesting the ways that, like, because so many things are true at once. I think that actually a lot of people who are trying to make content to illuminate an issue end up sometimes doing more harm than good, which is something I'm really interested in, in, in trying to learn more. Now. I also thought that the way that social media that she was talking about really shifted everyone to becoming like a commentator and, and the way that a commentator is not a journalist and the training is not the same, I thought was really interesting and something for us to spend more time on scary about the generative AI and where that's going to be going. Well, we need to see what, what's gonna keep happening there. Uh Because it's like you can't really fact check a generated image because it may seem legit if the computer can't tell that it's like a made up image because that would have been like a unique image. Sorry, I just moved to my little chair in my closet. Um oh, and then also the foundational issue with the 2024 election delegitimization. Just really what Renee is most concerned about is the fact that so many people still disagree on whether or not the 2020 election was real. OK, so now really curious about several things. One of them is that Father Coughlin need to understand more about that. I'm also curious about narratives that uh state actors try to put out in the United States. I'm also, I'm more curious about the Mueller report now. but Russia China Iran collaboration, what does that look like? Is that true? Um So really what I took away from this episode is that like how you do anything is really how you do everything and almost anything in our life is political. And so just really seeing that with open eyes, I love you guys and thanks for listening to getting curious. We love you so much and we'll see you next time.

You've been listening to getting curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise in the episode description and follow us on Instagram @CuriousWithJVN You can catch us here every Wednesday and make sure to tune in every Monday for episodes of Pretty Curious which we love. It's our pod pass on all things beauty. Get into it. Still can't get enough and you want to get a little spicy with us. You can subscribe to extra curious on Apple podcasts for commercial free listening and our subscription only show, Ask JVN where we're talking sex relationships are really just whatever is on my mind. That week, our theme music is Freak by Quinn. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our editor and engineer is Nathaniel McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me, Chris McClure and Julia Melfi with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie and Chad Hall.