

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Natasha Linhart:** At the end of the day, we're all in this situation together, and it's no individual's fault that we got here, but it's everyone's responsibility, regardless of what decade you were born in, to contribute towards responding. So, I would love to see older generations, firstly, stop saying that it's down to our generation.

Secondly, it stops having conversations about these topics in closed rooms amongst academic elite and instead actively engaging in the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and expertise and skills so that our generation and younger generations can be equipped as best as possible to face the challenges ahead.

[00:00:42] **Nate Hagens:** Today, I am joined by three humans in their early twenties who have found themselves immersed in the work and scholarship surrounding The Great Simplification. as you might be aware, the viewers of this channel and this content in the world, tend to skew older, but it's my belief that bringing young voices to the table, getting their perspectives on the future, Platforming their ideas is essential for us to navigate the coming decades, especially those young humans who have a systems understanding of the complexity and the risk that we face.

As such, this reality roundtable is focused on the perspectives of youth today, how they feel about the current state of the world, What their hopes are for the future, what their ideas are for the future of society. Joining me today are Priscilla Trinh, who currently serves as the director of communications at the Post Growth Institute and co coordinator of the Minnesota Youth Institute.

She's the creator of the Post Growth Jobs Board, editor at the Blue Marble Review and contributor to the Minnesota Women's Press. Also joining me is James Branigan, a writer, philosopher, and content creator with a YouTube channel of his own. James is committed to the task of addressing some of the many facets of the human predicament with education and food production systems being two of the more appealing ones for him.

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He is Irish and currently lives in Spain. Last but not least is Natasha Linhart, who is a recent graduate of the University of Amsterdam with degrees in economics and business and electives in degrowth and critical theory. Natasha has been a volunteer for our organization for the past year, and she will be starting full time as a research associate this summer.

I hope this is the first of, many round table discussions with young humans. I hope you enjoy it. Welcome, young humans, to reality roundtable number nine. Priscilla Natasha James. Great for you to be here.

[00:02:54] **Natasha Linhart:** Nice to be here, too. Thank you. Thanks for having us.

[00:02:57] **Nate Hagens:** Thanks for having us. Oh, you're welcome. you're very welcome.

I, I, Would like to have more young humans on the show because you are going to be living a long lives during The Great Simplification and, what's ahead. So let me, let me set the stage for this. I know all three of you. Priscilla was one of my students. Priscilla, I've known you since you were 17 or, such.

And you were my teaching assistant for my class, Reality 101. James and Natasha I've met online through, through the podcast. So I have various hats especially for Priscilla. I was a professor and a mentor and a coach and a friend for the next hour plus though, I am just a podcast host. I want you each to speak your authentic selves about what you believe and feel and.

think about our world and our future. And before we get to that, if you could maybe each of you give a brief introduction of who you are and what you're doing right now you know, brief bio Natasha, we'll start with you.

[00:04:13] **Natasha Linhart:** Yeah. So hi, I'm Natasha. I'm 23 years old and I usually live in France, but I'm currently in the British Virgin Islands in the Caribbean because I'm doing a few months of backpacking and traveling before starting work full time with Nate and his organization.

And yeah, it feels very surreal to be here cause I've learned so much from this podcast. So thanks for having us.

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[00:04:37] **Nate Hagens:** Priscilla.

[00:04:38] **Priscilla Trinh:** Hey everyone, Priscilla Trinh here, she her pronouns. I am also 23 and calling in from Oceti Shikohan lands, also known as Minnesota, United States, and I do communications work in the realm of alternative economics and food systems, and that's my job and energy right now.

[00:04:56] **James Branagan:** James. Hey, I'm James. I'm 25. I'm Irish, but currently in Granada. I just love biology and environmental science. And as with Natasha, I came across The Great Simplification and it's pretty surreal to be here. But right now I'm studying regenerative agriculture. And how to work the land that way.

[00:05:19] **Nate Hagens:** Excellent. Well, thank you all for being here. as is usually the format, I'm going to have a framing question and you'll each have five plus or minus minutes. and then we'll, carry on and have a conversation after that. So I would love each of you to respond. and describe your, own personal journey learning about the various economic and environmental risks and crises in the world around us.

and how has that shaped the way you see the future and your own place in it?

[00:05:56] **Natasha Linhart:** So my journey, understanding about the metacrisis specifically and how the different environmental and economic risks and crises are related and interconnected. That journey was life changing. it was definitely a rollercoaster and I'd say it was made up of a few different phases.

The first being a sort of awareness phase, which started about two years ago and that was triggered by a few different events and circumstances that maybe we can dive into later. But it was basically a six month period in which I exposed myself to a lot of information about the various crises we face at the moment, both environmentally and socially and economically.

And I came to realize that they were all just symptoms of something more complex going on beneath the surface. And that was the time period where I came across your work, Nate, and across this podcast. And that awareness phase really taught me, firstly, that we have this, Socio economic reality or this economic superorganism as you call it that's the outcome of institutions and behavior being oriented around

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profit maximization and the expectation of continued growth and the dynamics embedded in that socio economic system are driving the crises that we face and are fundamentally incompatible with the long term well being of the planet and of people, and That realisation for me was really hard to take because I'm a part of that system, right we all are to lesser and greater extents.

So I had to come to terms with the fact that I was part of something that was driving the crisis that I cared about and that I cared about addressing. And then it didn't get much better because during the awareness phase I also learnt about energy and about ecology. And I learned that this economic superorganism and this version of humanity was coming to an end and was self terminating because it could only function by continually destroying the things which its survival depends upon.

So that meant I had to throw all the expectations I had about my future out the window. And at that stage, I entered a phase of grief. I suppose I was grieving for the death of an illusion that I'd had about reality, but also about my future. And that period really sucked. I don't want to sugarcoat it.

I would cry a lot whenever I was by myself. I felt really lonely. And at that stage, I felt very powerless. It wasn't very fun, but I will say that it was 100 percent necessary because only by going through that and feeling those things could I then get to a phase of acceptance. and that phase of acceptance really meant for me internalizing and really fundamentally accepting inside myself that the future was going to look very different from the present, that the future was going to look different to what I'd been taught to expect it to look like, and that version of humanity that I'd come to consider the norm and which had characterized my life up until that point was Well, it had passed its sell by date and was going to have to come to an end if we didn't want the biosphere to come to an end first.

And for me, realizing those things and internalizing them meant that now there was no way that I could have a career or a role in the world, which actively contributed towards maintaining and perpetuating the status quo. So I had to totally redefine the role I saw for myself in the future and moving forward.

And now I very much see that role as twofold. firstly, we need to be putting in place safety nets, we need as many people as possible going into the future with our eyes

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wide open and planning and putting in place structures so that the transition to a lower energy throughput future can be accompanied by the least suffering possible, because I think there will be a lot of suffering, especially in terms of material wealth.

And I really fear that if we carry on going blindly into the future, then when shit hits the fan, we will turn to the worst versions of what humanity is capable of. And we know that humanity is capable of some really horrific stuff. But we're also capable of some great things. So I think the second task is to actively sow the seeds and create an alternative socioeconomic reality.

And I think that's quite an exciting task that everyone can play a role in because we need as many ideas and skills as possible to create a version of humanity that can not only outlive this one, but also which gives the biosphere and society the best possible chance of thriving long into the future.

So I see those as the roles I can contribute to moving forward in the short term. I think we need to be raising awareness and bringing this stuff into the mainstream so that as many people as possible can be contributing to those tasks. So that's what I want to be focusing on energy on in the near future.

But yeah, that's sort of where I'm at now. And to be honest, since reaching the acceptance phase, I'm very, content and very happy. and the lifestyle changes I've implemented as a result of becoming aware of all this depressing content have actually had a hugely positive impact on my well being and happiness.

So yes, the grief sucks, but it's necessary and it's worth it. And yeah, at the end of the day, we still have life and that's amazing. So I try to enjoy it. as much as possible.

[00:11:26] **Priscilla Trinh:** I resonate with Natasha's grief period, but I would say the metaphor I would use to describe my journey is a happy tumble down a hill.

I was rolling down into these rabbit holes, picking up flowers and rocks along the way. This clarity that's exhilarating, like when you're rolling down a hill, right? But you're also, as you are tumbling along, gaining all this knowledge. There's also this back of the mind fear, like, What if I bump into something that I don't like and I

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don't want to hear and it's scary to really internalize that information and then finally get to the bottom of the hill and I have to look up and I'm breathless by all that clarity, but also exhilarated because now I'm looking up at an amazing valley and knowing that even though the road ahead is very long and uphill, It's beautiful, because I'm not doing it alone.

I think when people have asked this question in the past, how did you get to where you are, it's always been explaining it as, oh, you know, we did the canon event of going to college and becoming radicalized, but it's a lot longer than that, having reflected on my positionality, how I've come here, growing up in an immigrant family, but I'll get back to that later.

I really think your class, Nate, was kind of the catalyst for connecting all the dots, right? You realize that. It's not money that makes the world go around, it's energy. And then when you combine that with an understanding of evolutionary psychology, it really undoes the whole monolith of human nature, and it really made me appreciate the plasticity of culture, and that gives me a lot of hope.

As I learned about the biophysical limits of our world, I was also moving more in the direction of activism. Intersectional feminism was a huge part of the lens in which I view the world, and it was a mixture of what I learned in class, but also the communities and spaces I entered during my organizing years.

Understanding that energy privilege is tied to class, race, gender, sexuality. All struggles are connected. And moving into how I understand about the existential risk and crises, really from a place of collective liberation, we're all in this together. It's liberation for all, and that includes interspecies liberation as well.

And again, undoing the whole binary and notion of tree huggers versus realists because everyone is affected, albeit differently. And Everyone is subject to being oppressed or becoming the oppressor, right? It's not just an identity politics thing. It is decolonization for everyone, and it looks very different for the individual.

And as I got more into food sovereignty spaces, I have a background in food systems, specifically organic agriculture, horticulture, did hydroponics research for two years, and Through direct action, through organizing, I came to really, day by day, I'm more convinced that local community power building is where I want to be.

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It's about channeling the big picture understanding into my corner of the world, right? We think about how it's not effective to be perfect. It's not about being the perfect activist, the perfect vegetarian, the perfect, you know, bike your way to work type of person in the U. S., I feel like, given where I'm at, and along, in addition to my full time job, it's also a job to be embodied and authentic and slow and intentional, like Natasha said, to really cultivate yourself so that you can be self sufficient.

but also community sufficient. Whatever you learn can be regifted to everyone around you. And I always come back to this quote by Audre Lorde about how caring for myself is not self indulgence, it is self preservation. And that is an act of political warfare. And I think now that we see everyone converging on this narrative of connecting these levels and systems at play on a planetary level, on a political level.

It's really cool to be here and alive during this time. And I know the word unprecedented was really ruined for me during the peak pandemic era, but I think it's really cool that we're alive in this really unique time in history and knowing that Every generation before us has had to deal with their own risk.

For me, I'm going to die before, you know, probably peak climate crisis hits, but knowing that I can do something about it is fine. The allure of being the charismatic speaker with a huge megaphone convincing people does not hold the same weight anymore. For me, it's really about seeing how I fit into community and learning how to then cultivate myself to be a part of that community.

That's how I see it.

[00:16:13] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you, Priscilla. And it feels odd for me to call you Priscilla because for the last four or five years, I've called you Trintab, which I will share publicly Jeff Bridges movie Living in the Future's Past, he talked about trim tabs, which is the little thing behind the rudder of a ship that influences the direction and your senior project was so colorful that I sent it to Jeff and he loved it.

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and since then I've been calling you Trintap. so we'll put, that, I think there's a hyperlink to it. We'll put it in the show notes of this episode. thank you, James Branigan.

[00:16:54] **James Branigan:** Yeah. H, just to touch on Priscilla's point that she made just there about the reduction of these complex issues into what I consider to be nonsensical binaries, I think to overcome The allure of that because so many people fall prey to that accepting one of the two ends of the extreme and to overcome that I think you have to be fairly critical in your thinking and so one thing for me that I think about when I think about this Metacrisis, or ecological issue that we're facing is that it is calling forth the best of us as individuals, because it has to.

We can't continue doing what we've been doing for the past however many years, you could say since the agricultural revolution, to your point about Surplus accumulation and how that self organizing around profits is one of the key generator functions driving the problems that we face. This has to change somehow.

Not to say I know how, but somehow that has to change. And just to be aware of that at first is of course the first step. But to your question about becoming aware of the ecological and economic issues, I suppose it's just a combination of Like intellectual honesty and curiosity about the world because when I was younger, obviously, I loved nature.

Well, that's not so obvious, but I really loved nature. I loved playing out in the fields in Ireland. I loved being among the trees. I loved being by the river. I loved making fires. I loved making slingshots. I loved these sort of things. of outdoorsy activities as a kid. And so I sort of continued to follow that thread.

I was interested in biology in school. So then I followed that on and I wanted to remain as broad as possible in my study of the world because this is so complex. And I suppose as a young kid, I was thinking, all right, how do I learn as much about this as possible and not like specialized down into something too narrow.

So then I went on to study. general science in college or university, and then environmental science, just because they're so broad, but yeah, so I suppose it was

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just a combination of that, intellectual honesty and curiosity, and then also the internet. The internet is a huge thing here, and The proper or appropriate use of the internet instead of falling into the trap of just being caught by the algorithm with the short term stuff and losing your attention or losing time by having your attention grabbed by that algorithm.

We can, I think, figure out a way to wield the internet to our own advantage as individuals and then hopefully collectively. And I think that, That's going to be one of the key tricks to figure out. And I suppose I heard that actually, that sentiment echoed in an episode you did, Nate, with Thomas Bjorkman.

And he said about the Scandinavian secret, one of the keys there to modernize the Scandinavian countries rapidly. was the implementation of these schools where people could go and learn not only about the external world and what's going on, technologies, so on and so forth, but also inner, sort of spiritual or emotional development and how the two relate to one another.

So, yeah, I guess that's it. It's the internet, curiosity and just not falling prey to many of the pitfalls and traps. That people who think about the ecological crisis tend to fall prey to.

[00:20:35] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you. Thank you. I have a bunch of questions for the three of you. are there any thoughts that bubbled up after those, the three of you spoke that anyone would like to follow with?

[00:20:47] **Natasha Linhart:** Yeah, I just want to echo what James said about curiosity because I think that's what's so special about this field is that there are so many different ways of getting into it. But for me yes, I always cared about nature growing up and especially about social issues, but no more so than any other sort of environmentally and socially aware average human.

so for me, the reason that I'm here is purely driven by this curiosity and this sort of craving to understand. reality and the world around me as much as possible and to get as close as possible to the truth rather than holding to any set of beliefs. and I think that's, yeah, also what really motivates me in this field is that it is, it's based on science and it's based on fact.

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And if you're curious enough to go there Yeah, this is what we get.

[00:21:42] **Priscilla Trinh:** In addition to that, curiosity has also helped me navigate triggers. You have to protect your energy and pick your battles online, especially when you're trying to be a communicator like myself. It's not about being this missionary convincing people that they should care about ecological collapse.

It's really leading with questions. If someone disagrees with you, I try to remind myself, why do they think this way? And then lead with questions rather than falling into arguments or that. Divide that we see so present across geographies and cultures right now. So I love that curiosity framing

[00:22:16] **Nate Hagens:** talking about binaries.

let's go to the one about intergenerational, relationships with the climate and energy and economic situation. I'm about 30 years older than the three of you. And so, you know, I've, Got 30 years of living in a world that was largely functional and amazing under my belt, now educating younger people on these things.

How do the three of you and I'll let each of you speak, feel about the seemingly perpetual intergenerational conflict and blaming in our current culture? And from your perspective is it possible that we could move past such a phenomenon and how?

[00:23:06] **Priscilla Trinh:** In one word, heal. Everyone needs to heal.

Intergenerational trauma has been a big topic on my mind a good chunk of my life and I think it's really important to unpack when talking about conflict and blaming. I come from a family of immigrants who fled the Vietnam War. I'm Vietnamese. My parents are immigrants. immigrants and refugees, and outside of their story universally, there's conflict, militarism, war, PTSD.

Everyone experiences trauma to some different degree, and that really affects parenting, manifests in money trauma, how we relate to the economy, and that affects how we relate to each other as people, and so To address intergenerational conflict and blaming, I think we have to then recognize intergenerational value.

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For those of us who are lucky to have elders in our lives, you know, I had my grandma, my maternal grandma, and I think about how in the U. S. there's such a sad attitude about people. older folks. There's ageism in the workplace, there's ageism when it comes to political social values, but we have to know that all these movements that we're a part of now, the environmental movement, the economic movement, they were all founded by people who came before us, right?

So elders have wisdom and value, and, Nate, I don't think you're an elder quite yet, but in some ways you are like our community elder, right? You have lots of ideas and experience to share, right? And it comes back to the whole constraint of our economy because capitalism in the U. S. means that we're bound to our day jobs, we have time constraints, and then we don't have the time privilege to then invest in relationships.

And I think investing in relationships, healing, recognizing when our emotions get the best of us is really key to then unlocking very generative conversations and having intergenerational movements because it's not young people versus old people at all. You need all of us. involved. And one book I read recently, there's an author, a local author here in the state, she wrote a book called Can We Please Give the Police Department to the Grandmothers?

And I think it was a beautiful exercise of imagination and how we can then rethink the way we relate to one another, rethink what it means to be safe. Because At the end of the day, we're very emotional beings and everyone is really just seeking to be heard, seen, understood. And that affirmation is important if we're really trying to build safety nets.

Safety nets for whom? Who, is benefiting from these safety nets? We think it's good for us, but maybe someone else doesn't feel safe from that safety net. So when we begin to heal and talk about mental health and really holistic health, I think it's, I think it's going to be a big part in moving forward to, to bridge these gaps.

[00:25:57] James Branagan: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. Healing is important. And I remember, in my mind, I thought of it this way. I considered there are sort of four key elements in, like, the individual human's life. And I call them the most basic basics. It's like food, Make sure you get your food right, make sure you get your

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exercise right, make sure you get your sleep right, but also make sure you get your social relationships right.

So that speaks to, Nate, I think you formulated it by saying something like, become a fully stacked, behaviorally stacked human being. And you, yeah, you pointed the same thing, sleep, food Exercise, because how can we expect to face these issues and overcome them if we're in any way ill in terms of our health?

That's not to say it's impossible, but why not optimize for these elements of human life? Because we can. But to this point about blaming, to be honest, I don't really, I don't really see it. I don't see my generation blaming the older generation. One thing that annoys me is this, The fact that it's the older generations who have all the resources and money, but it's the younger generation who has all the energy, but missing the resources and money.

So there's a clear sort of niche there for collaboration. And why it's not happening, I'm not sure. So I wouldn't really blame, I actually, I don't even think blaming is productive. What's the use? It gets us nowhere. So why not, instead of blaming, seek to collaborate and seek to somehow create the mechanisms that can funnel resources from the older generations to the younger generations in a collaborative sort of agreement between all of us.

[00:27:43] **Natasha Linhart:** Yeah, I couldn't agree more with that. I think it's about collaboration rather than blaming. I really see intergenerational blaming as a huge waste of time and waste of energy, because at the end of the day, we're all in this situation together and it's no individual's fault that we got here, but it's everyone's responsibility, regardless of what decades you were born in, to contribute towards responding.

And yeah, as James said, maybe we have, our generation has more. energy or time, hopefully, over which to enact those responses. But there is no way that we can do it without the experience and also, importantly, the leverage of older generations. So, I would love to see older generations, firstly, stop saying that it's down to our generation.

Secondly, stops having conversations about these topics in closed rooms amongst academic elite, and instead actively engaging in the intergenerational transfer of

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knowledge and expertise and skills so that our generation and younger generations can be equipped as best as possible to face the challenges ahead.

And also I'd like to see the older generation engaging themselves in facing those challenges, and many are already but we need more people in all generations doing that. In terms of moving past the intergenerational blaming, what I would love to see is if somehow we could adopt a collective mentality which saw this current version of humanity not as a final product that either has to be defended by older generations or destroyed by younger generations, but rather as a work in progress and within that having the collective maturity to acknowledge and accept human fallibility.

Like, we're not perfect, we're very far from being perfect, we make mistakes and we get things wrong and that's okay, but it means that We have to be learning from those mistakes. We have to constantly be trying to improve. And I think if somehow we could get to that collective mentality, it would go a long way to moving past these cycles of blame, because it would mean that we could, on the one hand, be grateful for what older generations and prior generations have given us and the experiences they've given us access to, while simultaneously acknowledging that mistakes were made and there was incomplete understanding of reality, which means that from today we can't make those same mistakes and all of us in all generations have to do things differently and do things better.

And we still won't be perfect but at least we can work towards creating something that we can be proud to pass on to future generations.

[00:30:27] **Priscilla Trinh:** I'm with Natasha that there needs to be shared values, and I think it comes down to a rebranding issue, right? I think many of us are disillusioned with ESGs and the Global North framework of environmentalism, activism, and, Systems change.

It's a very global North Eurocentric approach and recognizing there's a plurality of work that's been done over the years is important in bridging the narrative, right? Caring about our crisis is not a trend. It's not something new. Solidarity is not a trend. you know, something that you do now because everyone else is doing it.

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And I think it's really flipping the narrative of how these conversations are not just happening on podcasts for people who have time to listen to them. They're happening on the ground. And it really does come back to what James was saying. It's about this lack of resources, how many of us do not have time, especially in the Global North, where we have day jobs that keep us from Advocating for things we want to do, and then you gotta wait until retirement when you have time to advocate and lobby, so it's this mismatch between what we're bound to financially and our well being, because everyone needs a paycheck to survive in parts of the world now, and then how can we then cultivate time and space to do that, and that's going to take a bit of help.

outside of the typical, at least in the U. S., nuclear family or young adult living by themselves in an apartment.

[00:31:54] **James Branagan:** Yeah, so that is such a great point. The fact that most of us don't even have the time to engage these topics. Most of us are too concerned with, yeah, how to put food on the table or pay the rent to have time to consider these topics.

And so, This is actually one of the main reasons why I'm doing what I'm doing, trying to figure out, I hesitate to call it like an alternative lifestyle because it sort of has hippie connotations, but I'm trying to figure out how to live a life where I can fully study these topics and also pay the rent, so I don't know how to do that, but also then, Natasha, to your point about like, looking to the older generation to try and teach us better about the world is, I wonder, of course, the older generation, there's value in what they have to say, but I wonder if that impulse to, you know, find an authority, an authoritative figure from which we can be confident about, you their teachings and how we learn about the world is itself sort of preventing us from understanding these problems more deeply because I'm not sure the older generation even knows about how to deal with these problems because they're so novel.

Again, it's not to say there's no use in deriving knowledge from the older generations. Like Nate, for example, The Great Simplification thesis is hugely explanatory and it helped me put the right words to the thoughts I had sort of intuited about the world. Then again, I can't just rely on Nate to do the work that we need to do.

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We need to sort of relocate the locus of authority in each of ourselves as individuals and then work in collaboration with each other. Everybody having done that towards solutions, or long term management plans that can actually address the novelty of the problems we face.

[00:33:49] **Nate Hagens:** Is that changing? Like Priscilla from five or six years ago when I met you, these things, climate change was known then.

But energy depletion and polarization and addiction and AI and some of the other biodiversity ecological crises like PFAS and plastics and ocean issues and all these things, they weren't really on a lot of people's radar. Are these things commonly discussed with age, in age groups of 23 to 27, like, like you all are?

Or it, is it somewhat rare? And, and second part of that. That question is is it because of ignorance and, and energy blindness or systems lack of systems knowledge? Or is it because I don't want to talk about this stuff. I just want to enjoy my weekend and the beautiful day and not have to think about these things.

Do you have any thoughts on that?

[00:34:46] **Priscilla Trinh:** I think it really depends where you're coming from, where you are located geographically and culturally. I feel like when you're talking to us, it's a bit skewed, right? We already give a damn, but I think in

[00:34:57] **Nate Hagens:** the Palestinian lands that that would be a dumb question for me to ask, but

[00:35:01] **Priscilla Trinh:** I think it's becoming a bit more apparent.

I am very much sensing in the U. S. and in the left bubbles that there's this convergence on connecting the dots between economies, environments, and social issues. And while there is still a huge spectrum of nihilism to paralyzing fear, most people don't. probably fall somewhere within the middle, right?

Some people are like, I'm just here to make bank, do my job, retire and die. Some people are, it's out of my control. It's too big. I don't know what to do. Let's retreat into the woods, which is also just another form of dissociation. And I think the

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narrative happening elsewhere, global south and other parts of the world, maybe they don't use the same words that we do.

But they are thinking about it, because they have no choice but to think about it. In the U. S., there's still quite a bit of a buffer for some folks, and most folks in the U. S. still live paycheck to paycheck, so we're very much closer to being houseless than billionaires, and I think that squeeze economically is really forcing people to think about more than just what's hurting their wallet, what's hurting their relationships and the future.

So I think it's becoming more and more people's radars, but they might be doing different things to address it or using different words. They might be advocating parts of the system, which I think is important. It's hard to tackle big picture always. I think it's okay if it's a little fragmented and then politically, the vocabulary is catching on, but is being so quickly co opted.

That's why it's so difficult to have these conversations because you don't know who you're in the room with anymore. Someone could say the word sustainable or regenerative and you don't know if they mean green growth. Are they a techno optimist or are they an anarchist? Like it doesn't, it's not clear anymore.

So that's kind of, the nice thing about it is that with this digital amplification, you don't feel as alone sometimes because people are using a shared language, but it's also very quickly co opted and misinterpreted. So it's a mix of both, I would say.

[00:37:04] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you. James, you wanted to say something and then Natasha.

[00:37:07] **James Branagan:** Yeah, sure, but just to the point about the shared language thing, it's just so important to understand each other and use the same language, not, yeah, the same language and understand that here's actually what I mean by this, but that's so difficult to flesh all of that out, it takes a lot of time, like, the Perfect example for me is the idea of organic farming.

To the naive layperson, he or she thinks that, yeah, this is like no chemical, this is pretty natural and all, but it turns out that in the industry, it just means something like less chemicals than the industrial agricultural model, but so, yeah, to the

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question, I think for me anyway, I'd be a mis my friend group would be a misrepresentative sample because Obviously, I gravitate towards these topics, and so I tend to talk about them too, and so I'm surrounded by people who also tend to talk about them, but not very many.

[00:37:58] **Nate Hagens:** Does that make it easier, though? I mean, I would imagine you strongly value such a group.

[00:38:06] **James Branagan:** Oh my God, I can't tell you how much I love the people, the two people I talk about this stuff with. I love them so much. Two of my best friends, Sean and my brother, Patrick. But does it make it easier? What you mean, does it make it easier?

Having less people to talk about it with, or how do you mean easier?

[00:38:24] **Nate Hagens:** Well, if it was just you in Granada reading this stuff online and thinking about it is not the healthiest, um trajectory. So if you have other people to share, even if you don't come up with answers, Just a community, I think, is really important, which is why my class worked, cause we had 23 people in a circle talking about these things and sharing, cause this is heavy stuff to take on just as an individual person.

N.

[00:38:53] **James Branagan:** Yeah, no doubt, it makes it easier, and that's why I love that we can have this conversation now because I wonder if it will work like an attractor and attract other people through the interweb cyberspace to be able to have these conversations.

[00:39:08] **Nate Hagens:** By the time this episode airs our Great Simplification discord channel will be live and people can find out where people are in the world and, and have conversations either online or in person.

because I think that's important. Natasha, what, do you think?

[00:39:28] **Natasha Linhart:** Yeah, I mean, like James and Priscilla, I do also gravitate towards people who do care about these issues. And I have an amazing

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group of friends we have really interesting discussions about these things. I would say that generally there is, you know, people in our generation do care.

I mean, it's our future and there is general awareness about all these crises, but there are so many barriers. to diving deeper into the sort of root causes and the why of these crises and looking sort of beneath the surface. I think those conversations are happening as much as they, as I'd like to see them happening.

And, you know, a big part of it is time. As we've talked about, people have jobs and you've got to feed yourself and your family. And it takes a lot of time. I mean, for me, to be honest, I spent more time educating myself about this stuff than I did focused on my university degree in the last year of study.

Like, it's a lot of content to get through. and also there's one thing having access to the content and the other thing is being in the mental space to be willing to take on this content and to really engage with it. And I spent A long time in my youth being aware of these crises, but not really caring about going any deeper than that.

And it wasn't until I was in a mental space where I'd removed loads of distractions from my life, got off social media, was creating a lot of time and space for silence and reflection, that then, when the content hit me, I was willing to engage with it and get really deep into it. So I think there are a lot of barriers that we can work on removing.

[00:41:12] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you. excellent. So I will remind you all that I am not a teacher here. I'm just a podcast host. but I, just having this conversation, this is like the first conversation I've had with more than one young person at a time since I taught, um last in 2019. and I do miss the, life and vitality and curiosity and emergence that, that comes from speaking with young people.

Let me ask you, put you on the spot, each of you, out of all the things that you're learning about, some people call it the meta crisis, I usually call it the human predicament you're, you're well familiar with the different buckets of, risks and crises we face, like what is one thing in coming decades that you're most concerned about out of the whole universe?

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if each of you could just speak to that for a minute or two.

[00:42:15] **James Branagan**: Yeah. So for me, I just love my food. And one of the main things that I'm concerned about is no longer being able to produce food at the scale that we do currently, because the fertilizers, pesticides and whatnot won't be available anymore.

Or if not, that the fuel for the tractors that we rely on now to produce this food will just, will be reallocated to other places or just, it just won't be there for certain local areas. And that's one of the reasons why I'm doing what I'm doing now is to Relearn the old ways of agriculture, not to return to an old way, to understand how do we do this in the absence of oil and machinery.

I think that's a, I just find that intrinsically motivating to do that because, for the, you might call it selfish reason, that I love food. Not that I think the food is going to disappear in my lifetime, but just as a silly example, that's why one of those, that is one of my main concerns.

[00:43:16] **Nate Hagens**: It's not silly, and I don't consider it a selfish interest.

And I love food as much or more than you do James. Uh, Priscilla.

[00:43:26] **Priscilla Trinh**: Similar to James, that's why I entered the field I am in right now. I remember when I told my parents, Hey, I want to go to the College of Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resource Sciences at the University of Minnesota. And they looked at me, and they were like, We crossed the Pacific to escape rice patties, and now you want to go back into food?

What are we going to tell your grandmother? And I told them, You tell her that as long as people eat, I will have a job and it's really the basic currency of our societies because yes, we need energy to produce food, but without food there's no peace. You can't change the world on an empty stomach. And so I really am concerned about our food and water quality and the resource wars that are going to break out.

militarism is on my mind a lot. Everyone jokes about World War III. We are living in the apocalypse already. And that's one thing that gives me hope when you

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understand the planetary boundaries and the social boundaries of human patterns, right? All empires collapse eventually. And so thinking about it that way means that it really singles down a few of the things you should be actually caring about.

And I think food and water is one of them. And how are we going to set up governance models and frameworks at different levels, neighborhoods, towns, cities, municipalities, what governance structures are in place so we can navigate these hard conversations about how to allocate resources, because we do have enough food in the world to feed everyone.

It's a resource allocation problem and, you know, a corporate, you know, monopolization problem with big food, big ag controlling our food supply chains right now. And I feel like it's doable. And I don't think the answer is a million organic farms. That's not sustainable or viable. It's not about everyone becoming a farmer.

That's not how society functions. We need all roles, all skills, all types of passions. But yeah, food and water is something I'm taking on myself to cultivate skills related to that because I think it's fun. Like you all have said, I love food. And so that's something I'm focused on both in my personal and professional life.

[00:45:28] **Natasha Linhart:** Yeah, it's a difficult question because there's so many risks and crises that we're facing. To be honest, I think I'm more concerned with the way that we respond to those rather than the risks and crises happening because I think they will happen and I would love to be proven wrong on that. I think that we will have food shortages, and there will be problems with water, and there will be civil unrest.

what I'm, what scares me more is the way that we respond, because if we look through history, the times when the economy's gone bad and we've had shortages in terms of resources, that has had really bad knock on effects, and terms of the version of humanity that we become. I mean, we become really awful people.

so yeah, what I really fear is that, this, these conversations don't translate to the things that Priscilla's talking about. Us actually thinking about different governance structures and thinking about how we're going to distribute those scarce resources

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and how we educate people so that they have the skills to manage when we have to relocalize and can't depend on these long supply chains.

rather than just waiting for it to happen and then it turning really bad. So I guess that's what scares me.

[00:46:58] **James Branagan**: Yeah, if I might just add also that's also a motivation for me. It's not just my own love of food. It's an understanding that when human populations feel the squeeze and they see another human population over there who's doing well, they, this human population who's doing poorly understands also that they can just steal what they have.

And that. Gets nasty and that is sort of a pattern that you can read from history that tends to happen.

[00:47:25] **Nate Hagens**: So following up on that each of you, how do you maintain hope and cultivate resilience in the face of what you know about the world? And I would be so bold as to say, you know more than the average 23 and 27 year olds about all these risks and systems.

especially given reading the news every day of what's going on in Israel and Palestine and Ukraine and it's 45 degrees Celsius today in India which is like 110 or something like that. you get daily reminders of this stuff. So how, do you maintain hope and, and practice resilience and healthy habits, knowing all this stuff?

[00:48:18] **Natasha Linhart**: Yeah, I don't think we can just magically have hope from some external source. I think we have to actively create hope. And yeah, I see so much beauty in the world in nature and in people and in relationships and communities, but also in art and knowledge and culture. And When I started realizing the extent to which we're destroying that beauty in its various forms I would shift between two mindsets.

On the one hand, I'd think, well, it's all fucked anyway, so there's nothing I can do. Excuse my French. And on the other extreme, I think that I have to personally save the world. And neither of those are helpful because neither of them lead to action. So the mindset I've kind of developed instead, through which I find a lot of resilience, is firstly to feel those things.

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So, you know, I do get really sad when I hear the news and when I see nature suffering and people suffering. I'm really feeling that, but then also feeling The joy, but the beauty that's still there. so, and the sort of mantra I use to motivate myself is. How can I use what I have to do what I can to protect some of the beauty and bring it forward with me into the future?

And I think that if everyone does that, even if it's in a really small way, like taking better care of your back garden or helping out an elderly neighbor, if we all use what we have to do what we can, then we're creating hope.

[00:49:56] **Priscilla Trinh:** I would say deep time. Deep time gives me a lot of hope because when you zoom out and understand how we got here, you realize how recent.

The current order of things are dominant, global, north, white, capitalist, whatever you want to call it, society is so new. And back to what others have said before, when you understand that, it recalibrates your expectations. And that ironically gives me more positivity in the face of the polycrisis, because when you've, understood that there are material, financial, and social limitations.

It recalibrates expectations, and yes, that comes with a period of grief, like was mentioned before. It also alleviates a lot of pressure. Yeah, we might have some sort of Mad Max guns defending farm period, but it's not going to last forever, right? Nothing lasts forever in nature, and so nothing bad will last forever in human systems.

Yes, there will be ecological system impacts that will probably last forever in the Anthropocene, but I think going back to that social governance, like All the dire things we're seeing in the news, those will stretch out for a relatively long period of time compared to our lifetimes, but I know that The Earth Will Rebound.

We will find a place in the future to govern ourselves in a way that's equitable and sustainable, and just understanding that no revolution has been peaceful, and I don't mean just like the revolution on the streets, I mean the revolution inside, doing that healing work, that shadow work, that unlearning, the breaking and creating cycles in friend circles and families and communities.

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It's not just about that. It's about your neighborhood, it's about the regional impacts, and what gives me hope is cultivating myself. It's about gardening, cooking at home, foraging, being a better biker, because right now we're living in an information economy. data, knowledge, cells. In the future, that knowledge and data has to be uploaded into our brains.

It's a very Fahrenheit 451 situation, but knowing skills and having less dependency on scary supply chains that are fragile gives me a lot of hope and empowerment. Make friends with people who know skills. That's how you build community. It's not about having a million people behind you. And honestly, you know, there's that, often cited, number of like, you need two percent of the mass to have a critical mass to do something.

I think it's even less than that now, considering we have relatively stable telecommunication systems, right? The message can be amplified so much quicker now, and so your community extends beyond that. beyond geographic boundaries. And then what also gives me hope is communications, really trying to use asset based communications, because that really flips the narrative.

It goes from deficit and scarcity, which is what is used in propaganda and news and media, to really feel like we don't have what we need. But we do know what we need, and we do have what we need. And it's just, again, trying to create narratives. Even the most well intentioned circles like charities will say, we need more volunteers because there's too many poor, hungry, homeless folks.

And I, yes, but we could also state it in a different way that really empowers people by saying, We have the resources to house, feed, and uplift everyone. Join us in this movement. It really, you know, lands emotionally different in people, and it might instigate action no matter how big or small. I think it's this weird world is small and big at the same time, and people don't know how to fit into it, but.

just pick something. If it's safe enough to try, go for it. I think this, at least in the U. S., the academic system that many of us go through really kind of pushes for perfection. And if it's not going to work, don't do it at all. But I'm trying to push back against that myself and not be stuck in this cerebral space of just, like, despair.

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So that's my take on it.

[00:53:49] **James Branagan:** One of the things that really makes me study this and makes me like want to be a human at this time is the fact that there's no guarantee that we make it through this bottleneck or these bottlenecks of the coming decades which is like there's a sense of danger in that and it's kind of scary but at the same time that's what makes it exciting and then also there are like human experiences at an embodied level I've felt and I know like for example I love jiu jitsu I love training when obviously not when I'm traveling but when I'm back in a stable environment.

And there's something about that combat and exerting yourself so strenuously that after it you're steaming up and there's just sweat pouring off you. And the endorphins that are released at the end of that and the conversations that are subsequently had with the friends that you have made in the gym.

There's a comradeship there that is just a beautiful feeling. And so to maintain hope in this situation, I know That's like intrinsically rewarding and valuable and there's no amount of theory that's going to refute that for me. I know that is valuable and so I say to myself, okay, this is worth preserving.

So, and then I bounce out and I, as Priscilla said, I tried to gain a perspective and I say, okay, across time, I would like to preserve this if that's possible. How do I go about doing that? And then the how do I go about doing that is the challenge. That's the exciting part. And there's no guarantee that we win, but.

Why not give it our best shot, is how I'm thinking about it.

[00:55:30] **Nate Hagens:** So, so building on that, you mentioned jiu jitsu Priscilla mentioned a couple things maybe each of you could expand a little bit on the practices or meditations or skills. skills, or new behaviors that you've incorporated in your personal life as a response to your own understanding of the meta crisis, The Great Simplification, and how all these things interrelate.

[00:56:01] **Natasha Linhart:** yeah. So, yeah. For me, understanding the metacrisis, I had to realize that I had several behaviors and ways of thinking that I took for granted, but which were actively reinforcing the superorganism. So over the last

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year, I've tried to adopt lifestyle choices and behavior choices, which I can imagine as being more characteristic of a more sustainable system.

So, firstly, I really tried to move away from this constant craving for more and more, stuff, more and more stimulation, and that's a constant battle but I've tried very hard to actively slow down my pace of life. to value quality over quantity and to remove as many distractions as possible so that I can focus on the present and what we have.

and that's been helped through meditation, through getting off social media and just actively creating space and time for silence and for silent reflection and learning to actually crave the silence rather than the stimulation. So I really enjoyed that. And then learning to take joy and pleasure out of stuff that comes for free.

I realized that previously a lot of the stuff I found fun was in some way associated with consumption. Whereas now I take a lot of pleasure out of things like time in nature. I love going on long walks, time with friends and family and interesting conversation and dancing and writing and trying to incorporate those things into my daily life.

And then in terms of mindset. changes. I've had a big change related to nature, primarily through food, because like James, I also love food. And I've been putting a lot more intention and awareness behind what I'm putting in my body and where it comes from. And I'm so lucky that I live in an amazing part of the world with amazing local produce, but This sort of intention behind what I'm putting in my body has made me realize that my health is totally tethered to the health of nature and of Earth's ecosystems and my actions are impacting that health.

And that has given me such a profound respect for nature and for all forms of life. Like now when I look out the window, I see life in the tree. I don't just see a tree. And that's a very different mindset to, oh, I should make the environmentally friendly choice because of climate change. So that's been a mindset, a big mindset shift for me.

And then the other one I just want to touch on briefly is moving away from closed minded, in group, out group thinking. So I really tried to actively seek out and

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engage in conversations with people who have opinions I disagree with and who come from different backgrounds or beliefs and going into those conversations with the attitude that I want to learn as much as possible and I'm open to the idea that I'm wrong and I'm going to update my opinion based on that conversation and that also has been a big mindset shift for me.

And it's really taught me to be a lot more open minded and to realize that I am basically wrong about everything. yeah, and I do think overall, the more I learn about the Metacrisis and the more I develop sort of a nuanced understanding of it, I do think it comes down to a shift in consciousness.

So, yeah, I try to live the change I want to see in the world, and hopefully can inspire some people to do the same, because if we all collectively do that, then it triggers change higher up.

[00:59:34] **Nate Hagens:** Let me ask you put you on the spot, Natasha, do you think there's something unique in your situation, or your genetics, or your upbringing?

Or are the changes you made that you just described easily adoptable by people watching this episode that are 23 and having similar thoughts?

[00:59:57] **Natasha Linhart:** I think that definitely these changes can be adopted by anyone. what I will say is, cause I've thought a lot about this What I think is unique in my upbringing is that I was exposed from a young age to very high level conversations.

My grandparents lived in this little town in the south of France which was like this hub of international academics and creatives and yeah, film directors and artists. So from a young age, I'd be at dinner parties with like Nobel prize winners. and that was normal to me. And so I learned from a young age, like crave that learning and to want to be more interested in learning something new than in whatever I believed in.

I think that's led me to where I am now because my involvement in this space and this work was in no way predicated by me being like a tree hugging hippie or a

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radical anarchist or whatever. it's purely from that craving for knowledge and then when finding that knowledge that makes sense, being willing to incorporate that.

So I think anyone can make these changes but it's about being willing and open to finding out something new and the idea that you're Everything you might have taken for granted and believed up to that point is

[01:01:25] **Nate Hagens:** wrong. Thank you. what, like, what are some practices or meditation or, new things that you have incorporated into your personal life after integrating this into your mental view of the future?

[01:01:39] **James Branagan:** A very basic thing is something Daniel Schmachtenberger mentioned at the Norsken Foundation. He said, curate your social media feed so that the sorts of things that crop up are related to this, like the Stockholm Institute, planetary boundaries framework, that sort of a thing. And that's actually, that really works because I find myself going to my phone and then seeing this stuff late at night and my head is like, no, I don't want to study that anymore, I'm too tired, so then I'll just put the phone down, but another thing that helps me, sometimes I think of this knowledge as like a burden, sometimes, I frame it in that sort of a way, and I say oh my god, why do I have to know all this, why do I have to be here in this time, when all, you

[01:02:21] **Nate Hagens:** and me both brother.

[01:02:22] **James Branagan:** Yeah, when the shit's hitting the fan and it's chaotic and it's tumultuous, but then I say to myself, okay, useless, you're here now, so let's just be here and see what we can do about this, and I sort of recalibrate or reframe in my mind how I see it, and I say to myself, alright, this is probably one of the biggest the human predicament, the metacrisis, slaying the superorganism, whatever you want to say, is probably one of the biggest challenges that we're Humans, across the whole of our evolutionary history, have ever had to face.

Have to, have ever had to face. So, to me, that's quite motivating, and I say to myself, okay, so, either you step up to this challenge, and make something of yourself so that you can address it in whatever way possible, and try to make that, addressing it as big as possible, because I remember Natasha, you mentioned something like doing the gardening and stuff like this and don't get me wrong, I

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love all that and I'm here doing the regenerative agriculture stuff, but at the same time, I think there needs to be like agents of change who are so disproportionate in terms of the consequences of their decisions or choices or actions that

they're in a position of power that They can make those disproportionate changes happen. The, whatever decisions they make have highly, are highly consequential. We need to also figure out how to find ourselves in those positions. And I guess there just a concern comes up. It's like, okay, you'd want to know what you're talking about and what you're at when you're doing that.

So that also is quite inspiring for me.

[01:04:04] **Priscilla Trinh:** Building off what others have said about phone use, I think it's a very powerful tool. I myself have started to use social media more as I got older, and going back to that generational thing, sometimes I look at Gen Alpha because I'm Gen Z and I'm like, oh god, we're fucked, because you're iPad kids.

But I also have to think like, I don't blame you for wanting to dissociate on your phone because the world's a scary place. I dissociate on my phone too. I'm subject to that habit as well. But in my role as a communicator for my day job, as a friend, as a neighbor, I'm not going to post something unless there's a sense of agency that you can gain from it.

Providing avenues and pathways to then take action. I think it's good to affirm and put out some really emotionally charged content, but I don't want to be a clicktivist. you know, where you become complacent and complicit just because you posted something online and think, yep, I've done my part. And I also don't want to rage farm, you know, that's a term, rage farming.

You're just fueling the fire without really directing people to any channel of action. So that's one rule I've held myself accountable to. Yes, affirm people, but also try to provide agency where you can when you're doing your stuff online. And I think it's, funny, this ironic, momentum around re indigenizing, right?

There's the, sense that people want to go back to the land and live simpler lives and like really change the culture. And now, today, and throughout recent history,

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certain advocates of that, especially Indigenous folks, Global South folks, people of color, all other communities that have been socially disadvantaged or marginalized in the past, like, That's stuff they've been doing forever.

But also, you know, to counterbalance that with not painting a monolith, right. I don't think we have to look too far. Many, from my observations, I've noticed many immigrant families in the U. S. who come here and fully embrace and get ensconced in the American dream. They are fully in survival mode. They are just trying to make as much money, climb the ladder.

And that's a capitalist mindset. And then they give birth to children like me who are very against that. So it's very complicated, depending where you live, the privileges you have. It's a privilege to be having these types of conversations. But I think When I am in a space to have these conversations, I'm really trying to cultivate facilitation skills, how to hold effective meetings, how to make everyone feel seen and heard in a conversation for effective governance, decision, making models.

And I really think that's scalable. I think that's going to be pretty key to understanding the crises and how to address them. Because right now, No matter what type of enterprise you're in or workplace you're in, I think there's room to improve for facilitating effective, like, congregations of people to then come to consent or consensus around certain issues and values and then to move forward with that.

So, really, if I'm asking people to change, then I have to embody that change myself. And again, it's not about being perfect, it's just about being authentic and within your realms, within the privileges you hold.

[01:07:08] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you. and thank you to all three of you for putting in the time to, to learn this stuff and be willing to be on camera to, to share some thoughts.

Is there, any question that you would have liked me to ask that you'd like to um, close with some comments or anything else that each of you would like to say to our viewers?

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[01:07:35] **Natasha Linhart:** And I do just want to briefly say that if there are young people watching this who are getting exposed to this content, it can be really scary and tough if you don't have people to talk to about it.

So hopefully, as you said, Nate, there's going to be like a discord channel by the time this is out. But speaking for me personally, I'd be very happy to chat to anyone who feels like going through this cognitive journey by themselves. So just putting that out there.

[01:08:06] **Priscilla Trinh:** Yes, I also want to plug the emotional container model.

You do really need to hold space for people to process this, and I'm proud of the work that I've done with my peers when we founded a non profit called The Overstory Alliance, and out of that came Movement School, and it really was about educating, I think. And then providing a space for people to process, and then providing perhaps an avenue for then people to manifest whatever change they want, they're interested in.

If you're interested in chicken co op, go do that. If you're interested in building furniture, go do that. If you're interested in becoming part of the system, changing from within, that's okay too. But yeah, really emphasizing the emotional container, key to preserving yourself and not burning out.

[01:08:45] **Speaker 5:** Closing remarks, I can't really say.

Much to be honest. What I would say is, because I'm not sure what it was within me that made

[01:08:55] **James Branagan:** me realize, Oh no, that's not quite true. Don't believe that or don't fall into that trap. Maybe there's something sort of innate to humans that can guide us like that. And I would say, listen to that. inner voice that guides you in that way.

don't betray it. Don't betray it, not for money, nor for people in your life who would convince you that, no, this is the way to see the world. I'd just say, yeah, stay true to that

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[01:09:21] **Nate Hagens:** inner voice. I, didn't, Priscilla, I don't even know if you know this, but I almost called my class at the University of Minnesota, Things You Always Knew But Never Knew You Knew, but it was too convoluted and long, so I called it Reality 101 instead.

Yeah.

[01:09:37] **Priscilla Trinh:** After you left, Nate, you know, a few of us adapted your course to become another seminar led by students for students, and we titled it, What to Do About a Fucked Up World, and we just led with humor. Like, humor does a great service to people in healing and navigating, and honestly, we live in the age of memes, so why not?

[01:09:54] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you all, young humans, friends of mine, to be continued, and thanks for being curious and, wanting to share and try. Thanks, Nate.

[01:10:08] **Priscilla Trinh:** Thanks everyone.

[01:10:10] **Nate Hagens:** If you enjoyed or learned from this episode of The Great Simplification, please follow us on your favorite podcast platform and visit [thegreatsimplification](https://thegreatsimplification.com).

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