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MBS ([00:00](#)):

Okay, let me whisper this offer into your ear. And this is just for you. I mean, this is not for all those other people listening, and this is just between you and me. Now I have something, it's called the insider's club and it's amazing, it's exclusive. And the very few other people who are part of it, well, obviously they're truly extraordinary like you. And let me be clear, we don't just let anybody in. I mean, this is invite only, and the invites are rare, rare as hen's teeth. I mean, this doesn't really exist but it's tempting, isn't it? To be an insider, I mean.

MBS ([00:39](#)):

And you know what, actually? Even though you're not part of the insider club, the thing that doesn't exist, you already are an insider. You belong to groups, you understand dynamics. You're part of small groups of people that move in



certain ways, that have certain rules, that keep some people in and keep others out. Because, there it is, just as you're definitely already an insider, you are already an outsider too. You felt that sting of being excluded and different and missing out. So my question, and this is for the podcast as well, which is so what are you doing to create insiders, to bring people in, to make them feel part of the group and to understand the group? And what do you do to lessen, to mitigate, the pain of being an outsider?

MBS ([01:30](#)):

Welcome to Two Pages with MBS. This is the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Dominic Packer is a professor of social psychology and he studies how groups shape our identities and how decisions and our lives. Dominic teaches at Lehigh University. And he's recently, co-authored a book, *The Power of Us*. He co-wrote it with a fellow psychology professor, Jay Van Bavel. Now for two experts in the field of, let's call it group studies, you'd think Dominic and Jay would be pretty good at getting new relationships off on the right foot, but not in this case. And it wasn't just where they first met.

Dominic ([02:15](#)):

So we met there in graduate school, in our sub-basement office, which literally was the basement below the basement. So not a glamorous space.

MBS ([02:24](#)):

Not only was it under the ground, not only was it unventilated, but it was also tiny. And Jay, Dominic's future co-author, did something unthinkable.

Dominic ([02:35](#)):

We initially didn't like each other all that much in particular because we had really a pretty small space and Jay decided to bring in a bag of hockey equipment. I mean, he had a very small apartment, to be fair. And so he



thought storing it in our office would be a good option for him but it wasn't so good for me. I wasn't thrilled with that.

MBS ([02:52](#)):

Hockey or ice hockey, as it's known in many places around the world, involves very large bags of very odiferous equipment. So clearly this got off to a rough start, but clearly also it had a happy ending. Now Dominic brings up hockey and sports fans, of course, are some of the strongest group identities you can have. So maybe that was the bonding mechanism between Jay and Dominic.

Dominic ([03:17](#)):

I kind of liked the Toronto Blue Jays because I lived in Toronto and the Maple Leafs, but I'm not passionate like many people are. Jay, in contrast, my co-author, is deeply passionate about sports. And so we have that difference between us. But I think in some ways always been intrigued by group identities because I don't entirely understand them. That said, of course, I do belong to groups that I care about.

MBS ([03:39](#)):

So often we're drawn to figuring out those things that both mesh us and elude us. Dominic experienced being in and out of groups from the start of his life. He was born in England and immigrated to Canada at a young age.

Dominic ([03:52](#)):

First of all, you realize that you're a little bit different from most of the kids around you. I had in English accent while I was growing up and then choosing to become Canadian and go through that process as a child made me aware that identities are, to some extent chosen, not always, but sometimes they are. And you choose to take it on and become, in this case, a citizen of a country. And that can become a very meaningful part of who you are and the way you see yourself.



Dominic ([04:17](#)):

For me, as a child growing up with an English accent in a community where there really was no one else with an accent, it was quite a homogenous community where I grew up, typical Canadian kids. It stood out initially in a way I didn't like. You get made fun of and kids, in particular, are very sensitive about things that differentiate them from other kids. And so you might detect, I don't think I have much of an English accent anymore, in fact I think I have a propensity to actually pick up accents as I go, which can sometimes be embarrassing. I find myself talking similarly to the person I'm speaking with and it seems like-

MBS ([04:56](#)):

I'm not mocking you. I'm just kind of [inaudible 00:04:58]-

Dominic ([04:59](#)):

Exactly, I'm just adapting. But I think it, in part, comes from that. It was an effort to fit in. And in some ways I would have to say at this point, I wish I had more of an English accent because Americans in particular love English accents.

MBS ([05:08](#)):

They do. They think you're smarter-

Dominic ([05:10](#)):

They think people sound brilliant.

MBS ([05:10](#)):

Exactly.

Dominic ([05:12](#)):

It's an easy way to sound smart in America. But I think what you're getting at is an idea in social psychology we talk about a lot called optimal distinctiveness,



which is as we try to forge our identities, what we're often striving for is that balance between being distinct, you want to be an individual, you want to be unique, you want to be known for yourself and your own qualities. At the same time, you don't want to be so unique that you're a weirdo or that people don't know want to do with you. And so you're always striving to find this balance between fitting in and belonging, on the one hand. And then being distinct and unique on the other. And the way in which we often do that is actually by identifying with subgroups that have very unique qualities, but where we really fit in. And that could be your professional occupation you have or some other group that you're part of, you're part of the art scene or whatever it might be that differentiates you for most people, but you've got a tight knit community.

MBS ([06:03](#)):

Got it. And like, "I'm weird to the outside world." I mean, I think of a sudden flash, maybe because I think I heard you talk about this in a previous interview around walking into Harvard Square when I lived in Boston or Cambridge and there'd be like the cool punk people hanging out with the mohawks and the stuff. And I'm like, "Well, you're clearly signaling that you're not wearing chinos and a polo shirt," as was the dress code of the moment, "But you also all look kind of the same. You've all got a mohawk, you've all got a leather jacket." So there's a difference in similarity as well.

Dominic ([06:36](#)):

Right. Same and different at the same time.

MBS ([06:38](#)):

Exactly. Maybe this is a flip side of this, but was there a moment you remember practicing dissent for the first time, being part of a group and going, "I'm going to stand against this or I'm going to disrupt conformity within a group"? Because I think that's a key part of your thinking. And I'm curious to know when you first experienced that for yourself.



Dominic ([07:03](#)):

That's a very good question, when I first experienced it. I think I've always been, from childhood on, someone who found it important to speak my mind. If I didn't like something or didn't agree with it, I would often want to make that known even in the classroom in elementary school, if I thought the teacher was wrong about something or there was a better way to do it, I was the annoying child who would point that out. But the thing about it was I was definitely not a troublemaker. I was never a particularly rebellious child. I was never there trying to cause a scene or be the class clown even. When I did those things, I was generally speaking, I think, positively motivated. "Actually I think this is a better way of doing it. Wouldn't it be sensible to try something else?" And so that's always been something-

MBS ([07:48](#)):

The teachers love that.

Dominic ([07:49](#)):

Teachers love that.

MBS ([07:51](#)):

"Thank you so much, Dominic."

Dominic ([07:53](#)):

The thing I used to get in trouble for the most at that age in elementary school was rolling my eyes. I didn't even know I was doing it. I would often get accused of rolling my eyes. "What are you talking about?" Apparently I have trouble hiding my skepticism.

MBS ([08:08](#)):

Hiding the disdain.



Dominic ([08:09](#)):

Exactly. But interest in dissent from a more sort of intellectual perspective or in terms of our research really crystallized for me when I was in graduate school and it was the second war in Iraq. And you might remember the president at the time, George W. Bush, he gave a speech in which he said... As the American, we're ramping up for war in which he said, "You're either with us or you're against us." And that, to me, given that I think dissent plays a very important role in social life, and it's often motivated for good reasons, just sounded wrong.

Dominic ([08:46](#)):

I don't think you're with us or against because I think you can be both with us and against us, that is I'm with us and that I want us to succeed and do well and achieve our goals and flourish at the same time as I don't have to agree with everything we're doing. I might stand up and dissent precisely because I'm with us, because I care. And it might in fact be that the times I don't care particularly about a group that I'm not going to bother. I'll leave the group or disengage in some way. And that speech in particular actually spurred a long line of research where we started looking at those dynamics.

MBS ([09:21](#)):

That is interesting. What do you know now about how to dissent in a way that is effective? Because rolling your eyes isn't effective.

Dominic ([09:32](#)):

Sure.

MBS ([09:33](#)):

It reminds me of the book by Gottman called the Seven... Something like the Seven Secrets of a Happy Marriage and one of these four apocalyptic things that disrupt a marriage is disdain. In fact, he calls it the worst of them. And rolling the eyes is a signal of that. So disdain and rolling eyes, not a good way to



dissent. How do you dissent in a way that is for the good of the group, knowing that you are annoying people in the group as you dissent?

Dominic ([10:04](#)):

It's a really good question. So if you're dissenting for the good of the group, presumably your goal is to persuade people. It's not to agitate or cause trouble or arouse or be annoying. And certainly group members can do that. I mean, every group has some people they're just there to make trouble or they're out for themselves and that caused them to dissent. But it's really a personal interest that's motivating them where somebody who's trying to do it for us, thinks that we could improve in some way, is trying to persuade because without persuasion there's no traction or nothing's going to change. And if you're trying to persuade someone, I think you're going to have to try to be constructive about it. You're going to try to couch it in terms that people can make sense of, that isn't threatening to them.

Dominic ([10:49](#)):

So you're not rolling your eyes. You're not saying, "You're all morons." You're saying, "Here's how we could be better." And you may, at the same time as you're dissenting on one issue, perhaps be compensating by actually being very conformist or agreeable on other things to continually signal, "I really am one of us. I really am a good group member." There is other work on dissent in particular, there's a psychologist, Charlotte Nemeth, who's devoted a lot of her career to studying the effects of dissenters or what she calls minority influence. When small groups of people are trying to change groups, larger groups. And one of the things she finds is very important is consistency. So dissent doesn't necessarily change things right away. It doesn't necessarily persuade anybody.

Dominic ([11:37](#)):

And what she finds is that consistently sticking to it, saying it again, saying it again, not changing your mind, not being wishy-washy is actually, in the long





run, an effective strategy because it's really signaled to people that you're committed to this, that you really believe it. And it gets them thinking. And one of the real values of dissent in groups isn't necessarily even that you convince people. I mean, obviously if you're the dissenter you would like to, but stepping back from that and asking, "Why is dissent good for groups in the first place?" One of the things that dissent does is it frees everybody else up to think more creatively and innovatively and critically. And they may not agree with the dissenter, but at least they're thinking about it. And so we see this positive impact of dissent, even when the dissenter doesn't necessarily change anyone's minds, but it can still have a really positive effect in the long run.

MBS ([12:27](#)):

That's interesting. It reminds me of the research I've seen around effective teams and the way to make a team smarter is a diversity of perspectives, not just smarter people who have the same perspective, but there's no point in having diverse people and ways of thinking around the table if people don't feel that they can actually practice that. And actually be clear about it.

Dominic ([12:51](#)):

Absolutely.

MBS ([12:52](#)):

Dominic, tell me about the book you've chosen to read.

Dominic ([12:56](#)):

Well, I cheated a little bit. I have to admit. So I've chosen a book called Experiments in Ethics by Kwame Anthony Appiah. Who's a philosopher now at, I believe, New York University, but he's worked at Princeton and I think Oxford and other places, and he's wonderful philosopher who thinks a lot about these sorts of issues we've been talking about. I have to say this is not my favorite book of his, my favorite book of his is called The Ethics of Identity. But the two



pages I want to read are from this Experiments in Ethics book, just because I think they encapsulate so much of what he wants or what he is talking about and thinking about maybe better than any two pages in the book that I really like. So they're closely aligned, I'll say, it's a little bit of [inaudible 00:13:39]-

MBS ([13:39](#)):

Right. Well, just imagine that you're reading from the collective works from this man and you can make the link there. How did you come across the work? I mean, is it just part of your own work and your own research or did you come across it in a different avenue?

Dominic ([13:55](#)):

I think initially I discovered him just in a secondhand bookstore, which I love secondhand bookstores and I'm always perusing things. And I think the title just jumped out at me. I study identity. I've always been interested in this tension between individualism and collectivism and here's a book called The Ethics of Identity. And then subsequently I realized he has a large body of work and got to know it much more deeply.

MBS ([14:19](#)):

Somehow a secondhand bookstore is in some way a metaphor for the power of us, the randomness, and the connections that can be made that are unexpected and a collective knowledge that is greater than the sum of its parts. So I love that you got that story. Well, tell us about these two pages.

Dominic ([14:39](#)):

Sure. So I struggled to choose two pages. I love to read. I've got lots of books I enjoy. I also was tempted to go with fiction because I personally often learn a lot or at least I'm made to think by fiction, but I'm also not a literature scholar. I'm not sure I'm qualified. But this two pages it's by a philosopher and it's



philosophical and talks about identity, but it contains within it a very short, fictional story, which I liked.

MBS ([15:09](#)):

Oh perfect.

Dominic ([15:11](#)):

By a short story writer named Lydia Davis, she's an American author and she specializes in incredibly short stories and you'll see how short it actually is.

MBS ([15:23](#)):

This sounds wonderful. I love how you managed to get all of it all packed into two pages, fiction and non-fiction brilliant.

Dominic ([15:30](#)):

I gave it some thought.

MBS ([15:31](#)):

Yeah, I see that. It's one of the great joys for me actually of this podcast is talking to people who love reading and then hearing the struggle to pick the book and then to pick the two pages. It's wonderful. So Dominic, over to you, let's hear the two pages. I'm really intrigued.

Dominic ([15:50](#)):

In talking of nationality, I've crept up on one of the central concerns of contemporary ethics, the issue of our social identities: race, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, all of these may be profoundly connected with your sense of who you are and with your eudemonia or flourishing. Social identities are among the external goods on which we rely for our success. They are equally part of our individual natures. That phrase, social identity, is fairly recent. It's currency dating from the post world war II era in the 19th century, the



relevant issues were sometimes discussed under the rubric by "station and its duties." In 1876, FH Bradley's excoriations of atomistic accounts of individualism can sound strikingly contemporary, insisted that once we saw ourselves as socially embedded creatures, whose actions were only intelligible in a network of relations with others in our community, we had to take seriously those obligations that arose from our social roles.

Dominic ([16:49](#)):

Of course, there's a good deal of variation in how our social identities bigger into our flourishing. My maternal grandfather, whose father was an English peer, was known in his village as the red squire. He was, and he meant to be, a traitor to his class. Mab Segrest, in her book, memoir of a race trader, recounts her work against racism in her home state of North Carolina in the 1980s. Segrest took up the cudgels against racism, she insisted, as a white person. Her work for North Carolinians against racist and religious violence was meant exactly as a foreign betrayal of a competing notion of white identity. One identified with by many members of her family, which sought to maintain white supremacy. The social identity is only one aspect of ethical identity to be sure. Our own projects may be irreducible social. And in a variety of ways, my flourishing may be inextricable from somebody else's. The Lydia Davis story, or meta story, tells a parable along these lines. It's entitled Happiest Moment. And here it is in its entirety.

Dominic ([17:51](#)):

If you ask her what is a favorite story she has written, she hesitate for a long time and then say it may be the story that she read once in a book. An English language teacher in China asked his Chinese student to say what was the happiest moment in his life? The student hesitated for a long time. At last, he smiled with embarrassment and said that his wife had once gone to Beijing and eaten duck there. And she often told him about it. And he would have to say that the happiest moment in his life was her trip and the eating of the duck.



That's the end of a story or the end, or one of the ends anyway, of a life. There you go.

MBS ([18:32](#)):

Lovely. And I do love how we heard a story and we heard philosophy entwined.

Dominic ([18:40](#)):

Absolutely.

MBS ([18:41](#)):

What do these two pages encapsulate for you? What's so important about the ideas here?

Dominic ([18:45](#)):

What they really mean to me or capture for me is the critical and central role that our social identities play in who we are and how we live our lives and ultimately what it means to live a good life. And so by social identity, what I mean is the part of ourselves that derives from the groups we belong to and the relationships we have with others. And parts of ourselves, of course, really are individual. So there might be personality traits you possess that you just think are important to who you are or skills you have or interests that differentiate you from others. But a huge part of our identities, for most of us at least, are social things, is the relationships we have with others as a father or son.

Dominic ([19:30](#)):

Or they're collective identities of the groups we belong to, whether it's our nationality or our race or sexual orientation or the occupation we have, all of these can become central and deeply meaningful to us. And they're really the places where we live most of our lives and some of the strongest emotions we experience in life come about through those identities. And for that reason, we should care about them and cultivate them and be careful about which ones we



take on. And I think Appiah is just brilliant at understanding that and capturing it and then worrying about that and thinking about, "Well, what does that mean in terms of ethics and what does it mean, for example, as a white person who disagrees with white supremacy?" He talks about his maternal grandfather. Who's a peer, so he's in the aristocracy, but he's a traitor to his class. He's the red squire, he's advocating against the interests of the aristocracy. But does so as an aristocrat, he can't shed himself of that identity. So he has to take that on and then act in light of that.

MBS ([20:38](#)):

Dominic, as I think about that, and I think about the two stories that you read to us, or the two examples, a white woman fighting racism and aristocrat undermining the privilege of aristocracy. It feels like those stories come from a time when the divisions of identity were more encompassing, it was black or white, it was upper class or working class. The sense I have in 2021 is that there are a myriad of identities that didn't exist so easily back there. And so this conversation about where do I stand and who do I stand with, feels more complex. I'm just wondering if that's me as an older white dude trying to swim around trying to figure out what's happening or whether you feel this sense of what social identity is, has evolved and changed at all over the last, let's say 10 years?

Dominic ([21:45](#)):

It's a very good question. I don't necessarily have a perfect handle on it. One of the things that just, by the way, I love about reading Appiah's work is I don't necessarily find answers there but I find a great thought process. I can see him as I read thinking through these things and it gets me thinking through them, even though I haven't necessarily arrived at a good answer. And I think the moment we're currently living in there's, again, a bit of a tension because on the one hand, I think it is the case that people have been thinking a lot about social identities and the groups they belong to that might be of value to them and



have started to think a lot about, for example, intersectionality. How you might belong to a particular racial category, but you also, of course, have a gender and sexual orientation and those things might intersect in unique ways.

Dominic ([22:32](#)):

So the experience, for example, of a gay black woman is not the same as a straight black man. The intersection of those things is, itself, potentially a type of category. And it can feel, I think sometimes, especially maybe as a white man that there's this fragmentation. So that's on the one hand. But on the other hand, we're also living in this time of incredible polarization where political identities have become hyper salient and in some ways all consuming. And political scientists when they talk about polarization sometimes describe it as a flattening of identity, that it's like all the richness of our identities in life have been collapsed into a single dimension. Now all that matters is your political identity and everything else has to become part of that.

Dominic ([23:16](#)):

And I think that's a huge loss of the richness of life. And to some extent, I think there's a battle between these things right now, on the one hand, trying to claim the richness of my unique set of categories and really figuring out what do those things mean. On the other hand, this urge to put everyone in a bucket and say, "Well, you're left or you're on the right. And that's all your values."

MBS ([23:38](#)):

"You're red, you're blue."

Dominic ([23:40](#)):

You're red, you're blue. And I think rightly people are pushing back against that or that doesn't feel right. That isn't the entirety of who I am. And I'm a big believer in what you might call or what has been called social identity complexity, which is it's good for us psychologically and I think it's good for



societies when you let people have multiple identities and that they can approach life through those identities with different identities being operative at different times. And then one of the challenges, one of the philosophical issues of all of this is how do you live a good life, what does it mean to live a good life when you do hold multiple identities and you have to make choices and you want to act in ways that are authentic to different aspects of yourself, what does that mean for you?

MBS ([24:28](#)):

We've had guests on in the past who talk about, I think, code shifting, where... Is that the right word? I think it is. Where they're like, "Okay. So I have to understand my context and put on a mask that allows me to fit within that context." The other thing that occurs to me, and again, I'm fumbling my way forward in this, Dominic.

Dominic ([24:50](#)):

Me too.

MBS ([24:52](#)):

It feels that one of the things that's lovely about claiming identities is you find your people and you're like, "Oh me too. I'm like that as well. And so I feel seen and we have a shared understanding of a world." It also feels that there's a way that claiming identities tightly sets up the other, there's me and there's the other. And my politics are left and lean left. And at the same time, there's that talk around how the left uses identity politics, which is, "Here's our identity. And if you're not with us, you are against us." To quote George Bush and to certainly remove some of the nuance I'm sure that goes on in this conversation, but it's also true that there is a way of, if you're not for this, you are against this and a bad person. How could I, because I'm asking for me, how do I manage the bridge across to the other?





Dominic ([26:02](#)):

I mean, it's, again, a really great question. First of all, I think the term identity politics is often used in a pejorative way. And it's usually used to accuse people on the left as, "Why are you bringing race into this? Or why are you making this about sex or gender?" And what that denies is that power has always been held with people who had identities. Usually it was white male. And for that reason, because that was just so normative, they were largely blind to that. But inevitably people in power pursue their interests and the interests of the groups they're part of. And it seems a bit unfair to me to then turn around and accuse anybody else who says, "Well, wait a second, your interests aren't exactly the same as our interests," of playing identity politics because you were playing identity politics, let's be honest. That is part the nature of politics.

MBS ([26:57](#)):

You've just held all the cards so far.

Dominic ([26:59](#)):

Exactly.

MBS ([27:00](#)):

And now we're holding some cards now and it's a different game.

Dominic ([27:06](#)):

And the other thing about politics is it's supposed to be a contest. I mean, it is a battle over different types of policies and ultimately how should we order and structure our societies? That's always what politics has been about. And I don't think you want to create a political world where that doesn't happen. I mean, that's not democratic, democracy is meant to have a diversity of opinions. The question is how do you have a productive political system where those difference of opinions ultimately can result in compromise that benefits the population, that helps your society? And I think part of the problem with our



polarized times is... And I would argue this is not symmetrical, that this is worse on the right, especially in the United States, than on the left. But there's still toxicity on both sides, but this sort of willingness to overthrow the political system in a way or what's become more important is your own side winning as opposed to occasionally taking a loss.

Dominic ([28:05](#)):

But recognizing that it's the system and the institutions that ultimately can allow us to reach these compromises and ultimately allow us to do things that do in fact benefit the people as a whole. And it's a worrisome time for that reason. I think in terms of bridging the divide, a large part of this is trying to find those common goals. So recognizing that, right now, I think we are living through a bit of a time of crisis for democracy. A common goal that you can certainly find some support for on the left and the right is democracy. We may absolutely disagree about what sort of tax policies we should have or how healthcare should work but surely we can agree that maintaining democratic structures and institutions and indeed improving them, making them more equitable so that politicians are held accountable to the most number of people possible, is a good thing.

MBS ([29:00](#)):

You would think that that would be a place for agreement.

Dominic ([29:03](#)):

You would think and there is. But it doesn't include everybody at the moment, which is a sad and worrisome thing.

MBS ([29:11](#)):

Dominic, how did the work in this new book of yours, *The Power Of Us*, how has that changed what you do?



Dominic ([29:22](#)):

I think studying these issues and then especially writing the book has made me just more attuned than I was before to the importance of thinking about sitting through a collective lens, thinking about if we're going to change things, that the real roots to change are usually through groups. So I think quite a bit and I've held, at some point, some leadership type positions in the university I work for and aspire to do more of that in the future. And I've come to really understand or think about leadership as about managing identities, managing collective selves, helping your people understand who we are.

Dominic ([30:06](#)):

So certainly management involves worrying about employee evaluation policies and HR policy and dealing with the day to day stuff. But a lot of that is very individualistic and I think that's a big part of the job that's often neglected that is about us, who are we and how do I foster and make sure that the incentives aren't all about the individual and are we're also incentivizing good collective behavior. How do we create groups where people can speak out, for example, where you can have voice, you can have productive dissent that's not going to throw everything off the rails, that there's space for people to speak out. And then the group is capable of hearing those voices and taking in what's good about it. And also rebutting or not following every piece of bad idea that comes along because, of course, that can happen too.

MBS ([30:58](#)):

This has been such a great conversation. I mean, just wrestling with some of the hard things about life, the individual versus the collective. And how do you find the balance there? The power of finding your own identity, but in understanding as soon as you define your own identity, you define people who are not like you and create the other and create the tension there. And I think as we've been talking, there's no easy answers to this, but it's a commitment to try and



navigate this world, it's so important. As a final question, Dominic, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?

Dominic ([31:38](#)):

Well, I think coming back to that for every in group or every identity that I hold, there's an other. I think there is certainly truth to that we often do define ourselves in opposition to or in contrast to others, both as individuals. So I might think of myself as lazy compared to other people around me who are much more energetic, that's comparative. But in groups, of course. For every in group, there's an out group. I think one of the things we really try to emphasize though in the book is that that doesn't inherently therefore mean that those relationships are negative or conflictual or toxic. It's easy right now to look out in to the world and see a lot of that. And to think, "This is inevitable." And sometimes people throw around this term tribalism. We actually don't agree that that's inevitable or that this is built into human nature, per se.

Dominic ([32:31](#)):

What's built into human nature is groupiness, but it turns out that the way people behave in groups is deeply driven by the norms of those groups. And those norms can be toxic, can be oppositional, but they're not always, you can have groups that have deeply egalitarian norms, that have norms that are more concerned with others than with themselves. A lot of charitable organizations. For example, we're trying to help people who are not like us is, one example of that. Likewise, you can have groups that have very insular norms. We don't want outside opinions here.

Dominic ([33:04](#)):

But you can also have groups that have very inclusive norms, they're looking for diversity of ideas and they're welcoming of that. And so what that means, ultimately, is the norms really matter. And I think that's where a lot of identity work happens. That's where the individual in the group can enter into



productive tension because if you think your group's norms are suboptimal, we should actually be kinder to them or we should be more open to divergent ideas, then it comes back to this dissent that you're going to act, or you can act, as one of us to change those norms. And to me, I think it's really important to keep that in mind that this sort of tribal type of phenomena is not an inevitability and groups don't have to behave that way. And in fact, often don't.

MBS ([33:56](#)):

Early on in the interview, Dominic digs into the power of dissent and how it's often motivated by very good reasons. I mean, you only dissent towards things you actually care about. Now, a word that's the opposite of dissent is acquiesce. You stay silent, you are invisible. So how do you dissent effectively? And I thought it was so powerful to hear Dominic explained that effective dissent is rooted in consistency. You keep showing up, you keep pushing back, you keep holding a line. And actually in that moment, I could see and notice some of the various protests that I've walked on during my time and how actually I just wasn't consistent. Sure, I was loud for a day, but then I was done. One of the reasons you dissent is not just to win the short term victory, but it's to remind others of a diverse way of thinking and to role model what critical thinking and persistent change can really look like. This is the drip of water onto the stone.

MBS ([35:00](#)):

If you like this conversation with me and Dominic, then I have two other Two Pages' interviews to suggest, one's Jennifer Paylor, my friend. That interview's called trust is the key. It's one of the early ones. And she talks about just the power of building trust as part of making people feel like they're insiders. And then another interview I thought might fit with this is Minda Harts, that interview's called a seat at her table. Minda's there's been a champion for women of color in particular becoming senior in organizations because so often they don't feel like they can be insiders at that more senior level in an organization. So that might tickle your fancy as well.



MBS ([35:37](#)):

If you'd like more of Dominic in his work. Well, I'd suggest you go to the website, the powerofus.online, powerofus.online. And there's a newsletter connected to that. But if you go to powerofus.online, you'll see a popup, where you will see a place where you can sign up to that Substack newsletter. Thank you for listening. It's always appreciated. Thank you for passing the word of the interview on, that's always appreciated. Thanks for giving it some love in the ratings, whether that's a review or some stars, that's always appreciated. You're awesome and you're doing great.