

DOPE LABS

Transcript of Lab 014 ____

Titi: It's hard to know who to trust these days.

Zakiya: Maaan listen. I'm sticking with my A-1 day ones.

Titi: Because no one is out here telling the truth. I feel like no matter, what it could even be something as honest looking as a charity and you have to start questioning 'well where's this money going?'

Zakiya: Who's really gonna be held accountable. There has been some conversation at least on my timeline recently.

Titi: Yes.

Zakiya: About people raising money. What happens to it. And I... You know I love a good juicy political thriller. So whether it's real life or is something I'm watching on Netflix. I'm like "follow the money". What happens

Titi: Zakiya a real life House of Cards over here. She love that stuff. Yeah she's an investigator.

Zakiya: I know we've talked about robo calls in the past.

Titi: We have.

Zakiya: Now there is the gofundme. You got a double check and check and make sure you know someone who knows the creator of the gofundme to make sure it's real.

Titi: Right. Phishing scams like where it'll be you'll see an email and know look like it's from Apple because they're like 'oh confirm your email address here' which is a normal email that all of us get from all types of places right? And then next thing you know everything is hacked like Next thing you know like your own mama gonna show up to your door talking about some "can I borrow 50 dollars" next thing you know it not her.

Zakiya: It's a hologram! Its hologram! Hologram spam is next.

Titi: I'm Titi.

Zakiya: And I'm Zakiya.

Titi: And from Spotify Studios this is Dope Labs.

Zakiya: It feels like every where you look there's a scam or there's a you know or somebody is trying to catch you up in something and you've got to have your guard up.

Titi: We could talk about a lot of things actually. We get talk about the Tekashi 6ix 9ine...

Zakiya: Yessssssssss.

Titi: Tee it up for the people and tell them whats going on with Tekashi.

Zakiya: Listen Tekashi 6ix 9ine is out here dry snitching. OK. I got nervous I was like, "Is he gonna say something about me?".

Titi: That I feel like is a huge scam because before he became a rapper he was just a normal kid.

Zakiya: He was a regular guy. Then he puts on this other persona that lends him somed credibility and then he starts calling out Jim Jones!

Titi: And Cardi B!

Zakiya: And Cardi B! and I know they have to feel like they've been wrapped up in a scam.

Titi: Exactly.

Zakiya: Can you imagine minding your business.

Titi: And then all of a sudden somebody is bringing your name up in front of a judge.

Zakiya: And to be snitched on by somebody like Tekashi 6ix 9ine.

Titi: With rainbow teeth? Im sorry.

Zakiya: Jim Jones and Chrissy had a whole TV show and he managed not to snitch on himself right and then you come up here and be reckless.

Titi: It's crazy you know who I think is the biggest scammer right now who all of these TV moms. Like Aunt Becky and Felicity Huffman who are out here scamming the college admissions process to get their kids into the college of their choice. Aunt Becky was out here staging crew photos.

Zakiya: If you need a set designer for your college application. You've got to ask yourself some questions.

Titi: Maybe that isn't the college for you.

Zakiya: So I feel like we've touched on this a little bit before.

Titi: Yeah. In lab 003 'lie to me' with our guest Iyamide House.

Zakiya: But we kind of talked more about why people lie and why people scam. Today we're flipping it on his head and we're saying "why do you keep getting conned" "Why do you keep going for these same scams?".

Titi: Exactly. And I think this is important for everyone. So pull up a chair turn the volume all the way up.

Zakiya: And dive in with this.

Zakiya: Let's get into the recitation. So this really got us thinking. Right? We started talking about scams and spam and cat fishing.

Titi: Cat fishing is another huge thing these romantic scams.

Zakiya: Yes. And when you really think about it I try to distill it down to like, what's the motivating factor here what's driving the person that's doing the scamming and what drives us to fall for the scam?

Titi: Right. Is it like a specific type of person that falls for these scams? Or a specific type of person that is doing this scamming?

Zakiya: How do you tell if something is a scam or not? Who falls for scam A but not scam B? Who's going to fall for in-person scam versus an online scam? I'm not falling for in-person scam.

Titi: I feel like I would never fall for an in-person scam. I'm too..

Zakiya: You're skeptical everyone.

Titi: Exactly I wake up in the morning and I roll over, look at my husband I'm like "Is that you forreal?"

Zakiya: And like for us I think I'm savvy on the internet but I also know that I was on AOL chat rooms like "age, sex, and language anybody want to meet me at the carnival?"

Titi: Yeah I was definitely I was what I was like 11 and saying I was like 15 or 16.

Zakiya: So you have been a scammer for a while.

Titi: Yes.

Zakiya: Wow. You didn't even hesitate.

Titi: Yeah I mean because I..

Zakiya: Have you ever scammed me?

Titi: Never. I could never.

Zakiya: You wouldn't tell it if you did. And you better not let me find out!

Titi: That would be a whole new episode.

Zakiya: Oh my God. It'll be the last episode.

Titi: Oh Lord

Zakiya: No it wouldn't.

Titi: She would never let me live that down.

Titi: OK so let's get into the dissection. Our guest today is Dr. Lasana Harris.

Dr. Harris: I'm a social neuroscientist which means I study social behavior and the brain.

Zakiya: Dr. Harris is an Associate Professor of Experimental Psychology at University College in London.

Titi: His work focuses on what's called Person perception or social perception which is all about how humans process each other. And this is really important to understand right? Because when it comes to scams we need to know how we decide to trust somebody or not.

Dr. Harris: We look at things like audio so how do people's voices sound, things like smells the sort of chemical communication that happens between people, and we just measure people's responses in terms of their physiology.

Zakiya: And by physiology he means things like facial muscle movements, sweat, heart rate, hormones or brain activity. Measuring those things can indicate whether someone is anxious or nervous, for example.

Titi: But Dr. Harris isn't just studying how people process each other. He's also interested in how person perception affects the decisions we make.

Dr. Harris: And so we look at things like moral decision making, legal decision making, financial decision making and in the majority of those studies we use sort of classic economic games where we put people in competitive or cooperative situations with others and just look at the kinds of decisions they make.

Zakiya: And you're probably wondering how can we relate this back to con artists.

Titi: right.

Zakiya: So as we're talking about con artists and those that are being conned there is some interesting context here because in essence a con artist is using these ideas of person perception to basically con their victim.

Titi: They know that their victim will be processing them and making decisions based on that processing. And then they use that to manipulate the victim. But I don't really understand how.

Zakiya: This brings us to social cognition which Dr. Harris studies is something you and I do every single day. And it basically allows us to interact with each other, its the process of figuring out what's in someone else's head.

Titi: I don't know if I want to be in your head ..its a lot of tabs open.

Zakiya: Man 50 tabs and 50 windows and all those tabs represent my thoughts, feelings, emotions, goals or desires.

Dr. Harris: Now if you think about it that's a very difficult thing to do because I couldn't never see your mind right. I could never see your thought. I have to infer them from your behaviors and in order to do that I have to crunch a lot of information. I have to crunch a lot of numbers, I have to put together lots of statistical information and that leads me to make a guess about your internal state your mind. What's on your mind.

Titi: And this idea of social cognition really shifted how scientists thought about decision making. Historically economists thought that people just made decisions based off of their own self-interest. So basically what they could do to get themselves ahead so if its is a situation that involves money then you're just gonna do whatever yields the most profit. And that was considered the "rational" like line of thinking. But if the decision involves another person it's not that straightforward.

Dr. Harris: Lots of psychological and behavioral economic research has shown that people aren't rational in their decision making and social factors --and when I say social factors I mean are the people or the different motivations or goals people have-- really biased decision making in directions where it appears not to be rational.

Zakiya: That's interesting right because I think when I think of cons I think of them always being about money.

Titi: MmHm.

Zakiya: And when you think about cars that are about money it is just like are you going to pick up this extra dollar on the ground. That feels easy like the rational decision is yes I'm going to pick it up and I we have some more money in my pocket.

Titi: Right.

Zakiya: But if I have to pull the dollar out of someboy's pocket...

Titi: Oh.

Zakiya: Then that's a little different.

Titi: That's a little different

Zakiya: Right.

Dr. Harris: And so what you see in a lot of financial decision making involving other people or when these social factors are relevant is that people will often forego money in order to do things that are consistent with social and moral rules, Goals, and values.

Zakiya: Myleik had a podcast recently about getting your finances in order and all this stuff. And she talks about people that feel a peer pressure to spend money because other people are spending money even if they know they don't have it.

Titi: I don't know that emotion.

Zakiya: No. So like if you're all out and everybody is like "well we're gonna go out we're gonna do rounds of drinks" and she was saying you should just say "I only have 50 dollars tonight, Now that doesn't mean you shouldn't have additional rounds but that's all I'm going to be spending".

Titi: Right.

Zakiya: Even that right the people you're around like you. You find what are the social norms around the situation right.

Zakiya: So people may be like "I'm having the lobster" you know oh you're like '.

Titi: I'll have the chicken tenders.

Dr. Harris: And What we and others have been arguing is that while those social decisions are actually rational it's just that you care about something else, you don't care about maximizing financial profit you care about things like maintaining social relationships for instance. Or you care things you care about things like your reputation.

Zakiya: So our behaviors can be based on self-interest. But if another person is involved our decisions may be a little more socially minded. Why is that?

Titi: What will we learn from Dr. Harris is that our decision making is really dependent on our motivations.

Zakiya: Our motivations are the things that drive us to do what we do and they're not always the same.

Dr. Harris: And so what could be happening is that those motives become dominant or salient in those situations because of those motives a primary right. As we evolved as a species those were the things that basically drove our evolution. So our evolution was driven because human beings are what we call a hyper social species more than almost any other species we depend on other people.

Titi: In general there is a range of motives about three to ten that drive human behavior. But Dr. Harris uses one set of theory that talks about five of them.

Dr. Harris: Belonging understanding human beings right to know why particular things happen. Control, you want to feel like you're not just sort of randomly going through life but you're making decisions and you have some type of agency in your decision making. What is called self enhancement. So we're motivated to feel good in general to have this sort of positive feeling about ourselves right. We want to feel valued and loved and respected and then trustworthiness is that the fifth one.

Zakiya: Let's kind of just honed in on two motives.

Titi: Yeah. So for this episode we're going to focus on the need to belong and the need to trust.

Dr. Harris: And so I think when you have these types of cons they usually take advantage of these motives that people have. They tap into these deficits a particular place might have in terms of belonging or trusting for instance and they exploit that for financial benefit.

Zakiya: I thought one that Dr. Harris hit on that was most interesting to me was trustworthiness and he explained that as our need to trust others.

Titi: And I feel like that falls directly in line with the GoFundMe stuff. So when we think about Go Fund Me It's not just oh I'm giving money to just anybody. Somebody that I don't know the people who are putting out these go fund me. They really put like a real personal touch on it where you feel really connected to them. So then you're more likely to give because it kind of tugs at your heartstrings. You don't want them to be lying about Little Timmy needing a new heart. You want to trust them. Like I'm not going to go into that thinking that I'm being scammed I'm going to go into that thinking I'm being a good person and donate my 20 dollars.

Dr. Harris: When you go to a restaurant you don't worry that they're putting poison in your food right. The thought never crosses your mind because of that motivation to trust people. And so that's how we typically function.

Titi: That's why I could never do that like dining in the dark stuff. I just don't trust it. I need to be able to see.

Zakiya: Who is dining in the dark? What is that?

Titi: You haven't heard of that?

Zakiya: No.

Titi: People are going to restaurants and these restaurants are like specialty restaurants and everything is pitch black.

Zakiya: No.

Titi: They tell you what's on the menu and you order. They bring it out in front of you and you eat in the dark.

Zakiya: First of all the visual component.

Titi: We've already talked about in the cook out episode.

Zakiya: Yes! I don't want to lose that.

Titi: I'm not eating it just because I just don't trust it. I need to be able to see what if there's a hair in my food? what if there is a fingernail? What if there's a fly like I need to be able to.

Zakiya: A fingernail?!

Zakiya: You never know.

Titi: You never know.

Zakiya: The other dominant motive that's relevant to con artists is belonging our family, friends, relationships, clubs, churches even Twitter and Facebook. All of these foster our inherent need to belong to something bigger than ourselves.

Dr. Harris: And so if for instance someone isn't having their belonging need met right, they're going to be highly motivated to find another person to connect to. Even if I've never met this person and face to face and it's just been an online interaction they're still fulfilling my need to belong.

Zakiya: Right. So if you want to be a part of a group you paid a certain amount of money or if you make friends with someone online or something and I say "Well I would love to keep talking to you But in order for me to keep my phone on I need 30 dollars to pay my phone bill"

Titi: We're gonna take a quick break and when we come back we'll get into how these motivations make us vulnerable to scammers and who gets targeted the most.

Titi: One of the times that I feel like I'm being scammed the most is during the election seasons.

Zakiya: Yes.

Titi: Like I don't there's just so much going on and I don't know who to believe. They're saying all these numbers and they're saying all these things and I'm like "Are you lying just so that I can vote for you?"

Zakiya: how many people did you poll? How did you phrase the question? Was it leading? Is this a real poll? When you call me on the phone, Are you a telemarketer? Are you really with somebody campaign? What is going on and who is knocking at the door?

Titi: Right we've got a lot of questions and I'm sure you do too. So if you have questions about this make sure that you send us an email at contact@dopelabspodcast.com or give us a call at 202 567 7028. Or you can slide into our dms on Instagram or Twitter @dopelabspodcast.

Zakiya: All right let's get back to the lab. So are all these scams we're reading about and hearing about online happening because people are more susceptible? Or is it because con artists are just really good at taking advantage of these deficits and our motivations.

Dr. Harris: I think what happens in these crimes is a bit of both. You get the people who are more susceptible and you get scams developed by people who are insightful in terms of the kinds of deficits humans may have in terms of their needs for belonging. So for instance, the elderly get targeted a lot usually because their belongingness is a lot lower than the general population we tend to isolate the elderly in Western societies.

Titi: The elderly are one of the most targeted groups by con artists and it's not just because of their need to belong and to trust. There are also neurobiological reasons why they are more susceptible.

Dr. Harris: Most people think of the brain as something that's like a computer machine where it's sort of hardwired but it's absolutely not true. The brain is very what we call elastic, it's flexible it can adapt quite easily. As you get older the rate of change slows quite dramatically. Which is why our elderly people tend to be stuck in their ways as we say, because the brain isn't being as flexible.

Zakiya: So as you get older there's sort of a cocktail of factors that make you more susceptible.

Titi: A greater motivation to belong and the inability to easily adapt to new social contexts which might lead to you trusting people that others may be a little bit wary of.

Zakiya: If someone is reaching out to you on the Internet or the phone and is consistent with how you've always interacted with friendly, trustworthy people your brain is going to say "yes you can trust this person!" And it fits right because your whole life you've learned that when people approach you in a certain way they are usually a certain type of people which means you can trust them.

Dr. Harris: But now things have changed completely and your brain isn't catching up as quickly because it's not as elastic. And so you're still going to make decisions based on that massive learning history you've had.

Titi: So your beliefs are set, but you're in a totally different social context. And technology has really shifted that context dramatically in the last decade but it's not just elderly people who are the target. Technology has made us all more trusting. Think about how much you trust the internet.

Zakiya: I really trust the internet. I remember being so nervous the first time I entered my like debit card info online. Girl I got an American Express and I was like "nervous no more" okay. The other day I was at work and I was typing something and I said why isn't my address coming up like I wanted it to auto populate.

Titi: Right.

Zakiya: Save all my info ok.

Titi: If its an Online store it doesn't have Apple Pay where I can just put my thumb down. I'm very frustrated.

Zakiya: And as skeptical as I feel about other things. It's so interesting right. What we decide to trust.

Titi: I mean even on Instagram I feel like now.... A lot of you are going to try and be out here lying. But. We buying stuff off of off of Instagram.

Zakiya: Honey.

Titi: And sometimes that stuff don't show up the way your thought, which has happened to me a number of times.

Zakiya: I've always been skeptical of Instagram. I was skeptical of ASOS and everybody was buying stuff and loving it. And so....

Titi: No that's real!

Zakiya: Yeah it's real! But I didn't know. And the same thing with fashion nova, only Instagram people were wearing. It was like Instagram clothes. I just bought I think my first thing off of Instagram recently I bought a background today. Somebody posted this digital illustrator. I'll put it on the show notes and be able to check it out. And she had drawn this thing of Keke Palmer and said "sorry to this man". I had to buy it .

Titi: You didn't have a choice.

Dr. Harris: And I think now you have a generation of people who aren't suspicious of technology at all. Right. Because they feel like they have a certain mastery over the technology. So I think because of the diminished suspicion, people in some ways are going to be more susceptible to these cons and these scams.

Zakiya: That's a really good point. But why is that?

Dr. Harris: What's happened with technology is most of the interactions aren't face to face anymore. And that's a huge change for human beings so think about it for our entire evolutionary history, Every time we've communicated with other people we've sat next to them. We've stood next to them. We've seen them. So in addition to sort of making inferences about what they're thinking based on what they're seeing we can look at their facial expression we can get chemical information right. Because if you're anxious you'll produce particular hormones and I might pick that up.

Zakiya: And that blew my mind because as a fan of facetime and all the video chat I'm like "I'm getting way more information than if I talked on the phone with someone." But also anybody can have any prop behind them and say they are X Y Z whoever who whoever.

Titi: I mean look at cat fish. There are people who steal whole videos of other people and pretend to be that person.

Zakiya: There is a lot of information we're not getting when we engage with people online. Do you remember all those measurements Dr. Harris mentioned when he does the studies on people processing we're not getting any of that and it's actually affecting our decisions.

Titi: And not only that but the Internet has made it possible for us to engage with way more people and on a daily basis. So we're getting less information but interacting with way more people.

Zakiya: I talk about this all the time with my friends on the apps right. When I say the apps I mean Bumble, OK Cupid. Hinge all that right. And I say like they are like "oh my goodness... These people are crazy. This this and this blah blah blah ". And I'm like "you're just interacting with way more people than you ever would" if you were walking down the street and you passed 50 people. You're not gonna talk to all 50 of those people. Now you're on an app sitting in your living room and you got to swipe 200 people. I mean, not really but you don't I mean you're is different. I don't know it's just different.

Titi: Yeah.

Zakiya: It also makes me think about texting.

Titi: A lot could be lost in a text message.

Zakiya: Yes child

Titi: I think we've all been guilty of that with somebody like you send a text message or you receive a text message and you're like "What's that supposed to mean?" You're missing out on all of these other real person to person interactions that give you all the context that you need to really know what's being said.

Dr. Harris: But if you look at millennials now right all of their interactions are happening on the Internet. I mean it's fascinating. I look at teenagers and they're standing in a group and they're talking to each other. Sort of, but they're also talking on their devices. And so the way they're interacting has changed completely and that's just the way of human beings right we are continually evolving and changing.

Zakiya: So we're less suspicious but maybe we're also developing more rigorous you know detectors to compensate for that loss of information.

Titi: Yeah. We've evolved to this point. Maybe we can keep evolving.

Zakiya: I think we're developing all these tools right to know what's a real email. You know all those some of the Web sites will say have a question click here. I can tell us about a real person.

Titi: Me too.

Zakiya: First thing I do when I say "How are you today" I say "terrible". Now what are you going to say bot. Will you show some empathy?

Titi: Right. If it's a bot it's not it's gonna say "what can I help you with today?"

Zakiya: We're getting better at it. I think we're getting better at it to make up for that missing information online.

Dr. Harris: For people in my generation. I think we're always going to be suspicious because if the Internet came when we knew there was no such Internet and we had a lot of those early teething experiences that really solidified how we think about this technology. So even though we may use it as much as the millennials do maybe not as much. We have a different relationship to it.

Titi: So as humans evolve, Can the con artists evolve too?

Zakiya: And are we going to go backwards where everybody is so comfortable with technology that now we're all going to fall for like Frank Abagnale Catch Me If You Can type scams.

Titi: Right, somebody going to send you a piece of mail.

Zakiya: Yes and you're going to sign away your whole life.

Titi: Exactly.

Dr. Harris: Con artists can take advantage of that by targeting specific demographics of people of people who have more or less experience with the Internet people who use the Internet in particular ways and I think that's where you see it.

Zakiya: That might not actually be a bad thing Dr. Harris told us about this theory that links back to humans being hyper social. Remember we were talking about that earlier in the different human motivations.

Dr. Harris: In the 70s there was a theory that said well the reason we got this additional intelligence is because we're hyper social and solving social problems is the hardest kind of problem you can solve because you have to solve things like deception where somebody is telling you something about how they feel but there's no way of verifying that information at all. And so the idea is that things like deception pushed us to become smarter people. So if you believe that then what's going to happen is we're always going to be good at detecting deception. So even though we may be more or less trusting in different situations when a new technology comes in my usually it takes us a while to adjust. We're particularly attuned towards detecting disruption arguably because it's what drove our evolution.

Titi: So Solving social problems like deception has helped us evolve. So when you think about it this way cons and scams are kind of cyclical.

Zakiya: Yeah.

Titi: We get deceived we learn and adapt social context changes the deception becomes something else we learn and adapt and the cycle continues. And this theory says that's what's driven our evolution.

Zakiya: I guess we're developing a new set of skills that we're adding to our interpersonal Decepticon type tool box right. But Im just like what is it going to look like later right. Is there going to be a special shimmer to holograms so we can know youre a bootleg hologram this is a real hologram.

Titi: Like is the next step like voice simulations so like if you've ever recorded a video of yourself like.

Zakiya: They have that now!

Titi: On a Snapchat or on Instagram then somebody can take your voice and make it sound like you.

Zakiya: I mean they're clipping up you know for in the public eye to clipping up people's speeches from various different events and making it seem like they're saying something else.

Titi: And we already know that all the stuff that we put on social media is kept and archived. And so essentially somebody could take all of those things and string a sentence together that's like...

Zakiya: Something you never said.

Titi: "Hey Zakiya I need your help. Can you please send me one hundred dollars."

Zakiya: And I would send it.

Titi: I know you would.

Zakiya: Yeah right. I'll be like "hey girl I want to help you,but..."

Zakiya: That's it for lab 014.

Titi: Don't forget to check out our Web site for the cheat sheet on today's episode.

Zakiya: You can find it and sign it for our newsletter at dopelabspodcast.com.

Titi: Also we love hearing from you. What do you think about today's lab? What are your ideas for future labs? Our number is 2 0 2 5 6 7 7 0 2 8.

Zakiya: You can also find us on Twitter and Instagram at dope labs podcast. Titi is on Twitter @dr_tsho.

Titi: And you can find the Zakiya @zsaidso.

Zakiya: Follow us on Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Titi: Special thanks to our guests Dr. Lasana Harris he has a beautiful Web site. Go check it out at lt-harris.info we will also link to some of his other work in our show notes.

Zakiya: Our producer is Jenny Radelet Mast of wave runner studios mixing and sound design by Hannis Brown and special thanks to Tyler Adams.

Titi:Original theme music is by Taka Yasuzawa and Alex Segiura with additional music by Elijah LX Harvey.

Zakiya:Dope Labs is a production of Spotify studios and megaohm media group and is executive produced by us

Titi: Titi Shodiya

Zakiya: and Zakiya Whatley.

Zakiya: I'm motivated to trust other people.

Titi: I know you are My friend Zakiya talks all the strangers and I'm like "Hey hey we dont know them till I get to know them" She's like "They're great. They're going to another establishment to continue their night. We should go with them." ANd I'm like " We don't know these clowns!".

Zakiya: But that also is because I don't have any deficits in control. I feel like I ... If this goes well I'm getting ready to turn down his night very differently for these folks right.

Titi: Sorry to that man.

Zakiya: Sorry to this man.

Titi: I don't know him.