

## [Transcript] Mamamia Out Loud / 'Lonely-Kid' Content. Heartwarming Or Creepy?

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Mamma Mia Out Loud!

Hello and welcome to Mamma Mia Out Loud.

It's what women are actually talking about on Wednesday, August the 9th.

I'm Holly Wainwright.

I'm Mia Friedman.

And I'm Claire Stevens.

And on the show today, is there a way back for the real life Mr Big?

Chris Knoth has come out swinging about his cancellation.

Plus, what is weak language?

Why are women so good at it?

And do we really need to give it up?

And a viral opinion about lonely kids content.

But first, in case you missed it, Mia, a headline went viral this week after claiming that a mum refuses to get rid of her daughter's head lice because she's vegan.

Is this title probably made up?

Yes, but it made us so curious that we just had to discuss it.

So, a concerned parent wrote into an advice column saying this,

My seven-year-old daughter is best friends with the girl next door, whose family are vegan.

Recently, this otherwise delightful child was at our house and scratching furiously. And I discovered she was crawling with head lice.

I think we've all been there.

After mentioning the knits to the girl's mum, the mum said she was aware of them, but didn't want to harm them.

She told me she was in the practice of combing the lice and knits into the garden where they had the best chance of survival.

And they could just run next door and get into this lady's children's hair.

The woman was encouraged by the columnist to take matters into her own hands and call the police.

I'm just kidding.

And play hairdresser to treat the infestation.

So I wonder if she would be OK with someone else killing the knits?

Probably not.

Probably not.

So I went deep on this because my first instinct was, what happens if we don't treat head lice?

Maybe they go away on their own.

That's what I thought.

I can speak from experience.

They do not go away on their own.

They can be life threatening.

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What?

No, genuinely, there was this story of this girl, apparently in cases of neglect.

This is the last.

No, no, no.

And it doesn't go away.

And the head lice were like sucking blood from her scalp.

And then she had to have like blood transfusions.

Oh, please.

On behalf of vegans, which I'm not one, but I'm just going to say,

I don't like to kill things.

I don't kill spiders.

I don't kill cockroaches.

How about head lice?

There are two things that I kill.

Yeah.

Mosquitoes and nits.

What about rodents?

No, I don't like to kill any of them.

I'm a city girl.

I used to live in a share house in the city.

And I'm squeamish.

And we had rats.

Now, I hate rodents.

I have a thing.

But I wasn't the only one.

There were like five people in the house.

We wanted to put rat traps down.

We wanted to kill the rats.

And my flatmate at the time was a Buddhist and he was like, we can't kill the rats.

And it was like the biggest share house argument of all time was, can we kill the rats or not?

My partner and I were both vegetarian for about 10 years.

And we were living overseas and we had a mice issue.

And we tried everything that was ethical,

like blocking all the things so they just couldn't get in.

And my partner ended up getting those sticky pads.

That's not nice.

Because he's like, at least I can then take the pad outside, de-stick it, and then it can survive.

And I was like, yeah.

And run right back inside your house.

If you're willing to do that.

But I don't want to see a squirming mouse on my floor.

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I save ants from swimming pools.  
Oh my goodness.  
So you are this mum.  
Yeah.  
Oh my gosh.  
I mean, you know, for the closure of my life,  
we frequently have nits in our house.  
They haven't outgrown them yet.  
I don't know why.  
I nuke those because I do.  
And I have no shame or regret.  
Like you put them in the microwave.  
I put as much hardcore chemical action on the menu.  
Would the most ethical thing to do  
be what my nan suggested when I had nits as a kid,  
to just shave your head?  
Is that what the most ethical person would do?  
And then put the hair in the garden.  
Yeah.  
And then they can live their best life in your hair.  
You just have no hair.  
Your kid would love that.  
Yeah.  
I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions.  
I'm not going to answer any.  
You have my statement, right?  
I don't.  
I feel like you're innocent until proven guilty.  
Well, yeah, but you know, that's the way it is.  
I have the statement.  
I mean, you've got the picture, right?  
Yes, sir.  
Yes.  
Can we just leave it at that?  
By my statement sound, I rest by my statement  
and you know that the chips fall where they may.  
I just wish you wouldn't have to chase me.  
Mr. Big is trying to come back from the dead.  
Anyone paying attention to and just like that  
knows that Carrie is moving on from her one big love,  
considering even that his very existence was a mistake.  
And here in the real world, the man who is Mr. Big,  
Chris Knoth, is trying to move on, too.  
If you don't remember why Knoth was canceled

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almost immediately after his untimely death on and just like that in December, 2021, here is a very top line refresher.

In 2021, a woman claimed she was assaulted by Knoth in California when she was 22.

So that is back in 2004.

She claimed to have required stitches from the attack.

Another woman said that when she was 25,

Knoth assaulted her in New York.

Three more women then came forward with similar allegations, prompting his former co-stars, Sarah Jessica Parker, Cynthia Nixon, and Kristin Davis, to release a statement in support of the women.

Now, after these allegations and the statement from his co-stars, Knoth lost his job on a show called The Equalizer.

He lost endorsements, notably for a tequila brand.

And allegedly, that was worth like \$12 million.

And for Peloton, remember the ad they rushed out after Mr. Big's death?

He lost that, too.

It's worth noting that they had already written him out of the series.

So his death on, and just like that, at the start of that season had already happened.

And all of this news broke actually a week after that episode went on.

But they wrote him out of the last episode.

He was meant to reappear and then they did.

In a dream sequence, yeah.

Since then, he's been absent until now.

In an interview with USA Today, he's spoken about the allegations.

He denies them, of course, but he says he is guilty of cheating on his wife.

I strayed on my wife and it's devastating to her and not a very pretty picture.

He says, what it isn't is a crime.

He also said about the cheating.

You give yourself the same excuses that many men do.

It's just a little side dance and it's fun.

You're not hurting anybody.

No one's going to know about this.

And sex is just enjoyable.

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And suddenly, a lot of people want to have sex with you.  
We assume he's talking about fame, then.  
It's like, well, I'm not going to get this chance again.  
Now, the reason he's speaking is  
because he's got his first public job  
since the allegations broke,  
well, one of his first few public jobs.  
And apparently it's an unpaid one.  
He's the face of a suit brand.  
And as part of that campaign,  
they're running a whole thing about men's mental health.  
And he says he was paid not in money, but in clothes.  
It's a very tenuous link, this whole thing.  
USA Today did an interview with the CEO of the company  
who said, no one looks as good in a suit as Mr. Big.  
And then there's the thing about the men's mental health.  
And I don't understand if we're meant to be worried  
about who's not mentally ill.  
What's important to note here  
and what he is making a point of,  
he says no criminal charges have been laid.  
So it's been more than a year.  
It's been a year and a half.  
The women involved are being represented  
by a big name lawyer, Gloria Alred,  
who represents a lot of women in these situations.  
And there's a very live possibility  
of civil suits still being laid, but no criminal charge.  
And he's cynical about the civil suits.  
He says that's a money train for lots of people.  
He also says that he needs to find a way back to work.  
He said, it's a salacious story, but not a true one.  
And I can't just say, well, okay,  
that's it for me because of that.  
I'm an actor.  
I have other things I want to do creatively  
and I have children to support.  
I can't just rest on my laurels.  
So yeah, I have enough to let a year drift,  
by which I assume he means this past year,  
he hasn't worked, but I don't know how to gauge  
or judge getting back into the club,  
the business because corporations are frightened.  
So should-

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Can't imagine why.

No, should Chris Knoth be able to get another job?

Mia.

Well, I thought it was also interesting that he specified or the company specified they were paying him in clothes, not money, as if that somehow-

It's-

I think that's because of the charitable angle.

Oh, I see, it's all very odd.

Look, I find this whole story really perplexing.

I mean, we've talked about this before in terms of when women come out or when someone comes out and makes a claim about you, but it doesn't go to court.

As he said, how do you prove yourself innocent if that's what you claim to be, which he does?

Yeah, he kind of hints that like, I'd rather it had gone to court, so I could have had my time on the stand.

Yeah.

And I also think when he says, what's my way back?

He's quite feisty.

I've had a year on the bench, I've run out of money.

I mean, maybe he's doing this to scare them off a civil suit because if he says, I've got no money, then what are they gonna sue him for?

Strategy.

So it could be strategy.

I think this is just so embarrassing for him.

It's been 18 months,

he's a 68-year-old with three properties.

I think he's gonna be absolutely fine.

And a three-year-old.

Like, yes, but he has literally three properties and I do not feel as though Chris Knoth is gonna go broke, the man can get all sorts of jobs.

He can get any kind of job behind the scenes, but what he's asking for is a multimillion dollar.

But he can't, so that's what he's saying.

No job.

So he couldn't walk into a convenience store and get a job as a cashier.

I guess he probably could,

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although he's saying that you're in this limbo  
of everyone thinks you're guilty  
and you have no way of either doing your time  
and coming out the other side of it  
or proving that you're innocent.  
So you're just like, no one wants to touch you.  
When I saw this,  
when I first saw this interview that came out with him,  
I read it and I thought,  
I do get his point that the court of public opinion  
is really, really tricky  
and there's no way to absolve yourself of guilt.  
But particularly when it comes to sexual assault  
and I encourage anyone to go back  
and read the full stories of the women,  
it's just sickening, it's violent, it's rape,  
you're reading these stories  
and the women's stories were very similar  
and came out at the same time.  
But they had contacted publications completely separately.  
Sorry, that's what I meant.  
I didn't mean to imply that they'd colluded,  
I meant the opposite,  
that the things that they spoke about independently  
were very specific.  
Yes, but I think particularly with these stories,  
we see them in the court of public opinion  
because our justice system fails women  
who have experienced sexual assault.  
If they go to court,  
I mean, just look at some of the media stories  
in Australia right now.  
If you go to court and pursue this,  
there's a big chance you're not gonna get justice  
and it's gonna be an absolutely horrible experience.  
And the other thing is Chris Knoth giving this interview  
and acting like there's no way for him to come back from this.  
If you look at Hollywood, a lot of people can and do.  
So he just said this is cheating,  
this is not sexual assault.  
What did you think about that?  
Oh, I think he's trying to deflect,  
completely trying to deflect and explain cheating.  
Even what he said about cheating, I found disgusting.

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That he's like, everyone's throwing themselves at me, everybody wants to have sex with me.

That was the only bit of this interview that I was like, fair.

Like I think.

But then don't be married.

No, I mean, I agree.

It's interesting to note,

so he's been with his wife for a very long time.

They got married in 2012,

but they'd already been together for 10 years.

That's why he said I was cheating on her in these historical offenses.

And they've got two kids, one of whom's little, as you've said, me,

like a little sort of toddler age

and one of whom's a teenager.

So they've been together for a really long time.

And what he basically says in this is,

not an unfamiliar sentiment from someone who's like,

so, you know, a bit of cheating,

a bit of messing around and saying that

it's hard for famous people

because they get opportunities thrown at them.

That bit's true.

I actually like it when people talk about that

because I think it's true.

And why do they have to pretend otherwise and be like,

oh, little me, no one wants to sleep with me.

So you mean that the temptation for someone

who's famous or powerful is more difficult

because they have more opportunity

than it is for someone who doesn't.

Like my opportunities to cheat, pretty small.

So it's harder for someone like Khrusnoff

to stay faithful.

Definitely.

Because there is no argument

that when people are high profile,

more people want to sleep with them.

Like male, female, whatever, right?

But it's interesting that he says that.

He says, people throw themselves at me.

But if you read the women's stories,



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they're actually kind of saying the same thing,  
which is the problem is when people throw themselves at you,  
you don't understand consent.

100%.

Because you assume everybody wants to have sex with you.

And I want to make it clear that my sort of endorsement  
of like, that's an accurate statement that he's making.

It does not in any way mean I endorse any of the other things  
he's saying, I believe the women.

Like I absolutely do.

And I think what's interesting here,  
it's a good point that you made Claire,  
is like you might not get criminal justice  
in a case like this.

In fact, you're probably almost guaranteed to not  
as a complainant, as a victim or an alleged victim,  
we should say.

But him having his life ruined,  
it's actually kind of satisfying.

Like it kind of is, I'm just going to say it.

It might not be appropriate,  
but it is because he can get jobs, Claire's right.

And I don't mean a convenience store.

I mean, he can do jobs that would be beneath him  
and embarrassing.

So he's been sprucing some stuff on Instagram, card games,  
things like that.

His problem is his market has shifted.

When he was Mr. Big, his brand was lovable bad guy.

Always an edge of danger that was part of his brand, right?

But like, sexy though, we like him.

Oh, he looks good in a suit, whatever.

So he was marketing to women.

Now women have heard these stories about him,  
made their judgments on whether or not they believe them.

And they've gone, no, not lovable bad guy,  
dangerous man who might actually assault me.

You can't sell me anything anymore.

Either a believable, lovable character or a product.

So his options are market to dudes,  
like Johnny Depp does in those Dior ads,  
where he's like, savage.

And it's like, he might be a douche,  
but the guys who are buying it are also douches.

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Not that I'm libeling every man who buys Dior aftershave.  
But you know what I mean?  
There's still a large market there.  
Some guys who'll be going,  
Chris North is just a good guy who got caught up in me too.  
But he'll never be able to pull off again what he used to,  
which is like, fated around New York,  
eating in the best restaurants.  
Everyone's like, oh, Mr. Big, so sexy.  
Those days are gone, Chris.  
And I think that's great.  
I think it's really telling that his co-stars  
did come out and release a statement very quickly  
after the allegations came out.  
For me, that says a lot about his character, perhaps,  
that they weren't willing to defend him.  
And I went back and read a few interviews  
and he is very-  
It was a hard time to defend anyone though.  
But I mean, I agree with you.  
It suggests that they were like, mmm, reads right.  
And I think also, again,  
if you look at the details of the stories,  
they're pretty hard to argue with.  
And there are all sorts of examples  
in the stories of the alleged victims telling friends  
and those friends backing it up,  
having been there the night it happened.  
And so I think it's really hard to read those stories  
and completely dismiss them.  
And then reading Chris North's recent interview  
feels really, really tone deaf.  
Because I understand that he feels  
he has to defend himself,  
but he has completely not acknowledged the distress  
that these women have expressed.  
I agree with you.  
I think there's a type of man.  
I'd put him in the Donald Trump category here,  
which that's exactly what Donald Trump said,  
which is when you're famous, they let you do it.  
They let you grab them by the pussy.  
And it's like, that's the problem.  
Yeah.

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And so Chris North probably still thinks that this,  
and clearly that this is a shakedown  
and then he did nothing wrong.  
And that's why he said this thing of women  
throw themselves at you.  
It's this idea that I think you'd get a very skewed view  
of what women want from you.  
There's an essay in the New York Times  
that's making me feel better about myself.  
It's by organisational psychologist and writer, Adam Grant,  
and it's called Women Know Exactly What They're Doing  
When They Use Weak Language.  
Grant argues that so-called weak language  
is an underappreciated source of strength  
and that we shouldn't undermine women for using it.  
What's weak language?  
So weak language is things like I don't know  
and I hope or I'm no expert,  
but sort of kind of asking questions,  
like wouldn't you say or write,  
rather than being completely direct in your communication.  
That's sort of apologetic.  
So, for example, when we, out loud as when we're trying  
to think of a headline or an episode title or something,  
we'll often preface it with, this is a terrible idea  
and it's not this, but, and then we'll say  
what we actually think instead of saying, how about,  
okay, so is that weak language?  
And there's also all sorts of internet discourse  
that has been going around about  
how women apologise in emails.  
Like, so sorry for the delayed response,  
sorry for the inconvenience, all of that stuff.  
All the time.  
Hi, boss, sorry to bother you again.  
I just wanted to check in to see if you had a chance  
to review the document.  
I really appreciate all the time you put in  
to help me on this.  
Thank you, goodbye.  
Reset shows, women are actually more likely  
to get a salary bump when they use weak language.  
Things like, I don't know how typical this is  
and I hope my skills have shown

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rather than being really direct.

For men.

So rather than walking in there and going,

I think I'm worth this, this.

For men, use of weak language neither helped nor hurt.

So in 29 studies, women in a variety of situations had a tendency to use more tentative language than men, but that language doesn't necessarily reflect a lack of assertiveness or conviction.

It's a way to convey interpersonal sensitivity and an interest in other people's perspectives and that's why it's powerful.

So Adam Grant says that women's assertiveness is often perceived as aggression.

So what we've done is we've learnt to be more tentative and to kind of caveat everything that we say with weaker language because it's a strategy we use to actually get what we want.

That's manipulation.

Women are so naughty and tentative.

Yes, so in the workplace, all those disclaimers and kind of hedging what we're saying makes us more likeable, trustworthy and persuasive and it helps us get ahead.

So of course, in an ideal world, gender stereotypes wouldn't exist and women wouldn't need to do this.

We could communicate in exactly the same way as men.

But the fact is, those stereotypes do exist.

So why should we look down on women who are actually using a strategy that historically works?

Because women are constantly being told not to use that kind of language and to go in and advocate for ourselves.

Grant says we should normalise weak language.

Mia, you've never used weak language in your life.

How do you respond to it at work?

I use weak language all the time.

You reckon?

All the time.

I think you're the exception to the rule.

I was going to say, like, I know some women who are very direct and some of my friends are very direct and me is one of them.

Yes, I don't think you do.

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I think probably Perry has made me more direct  
and Getting Older has made me more direct.  
Confidence.  
But I've always, not confidence in patience  
and intolerance, I would say.  
And that's where the stereotype of the Karen comes from.  
Because Karen's don't use weak language.  
A woman who is forthright, but there you go.  
A woman who is forthright and doesn't use weak language  
is ridiculed and mocked.  
But that's because she's pissing people off.  
Like, if you're rude to people, they don't like it.  
No, no, but I disagree.  
If that's all that the term Karen was used to describe,  
I would agree with that.  
But the way it's used in our society  
is to describe anybody who has a forthright opinion  
and doesn't apologize for asking for what she paid for  
or speaking to the manager.  
Back to the idea of weak language,  
which I think this is part of,  
my question is, do we do it deliberately?  
Or I think we've just internalized  
that society does not reward or like a forthright woman.  
The most important word that you use there was likable.  
So we know that the way to be likable as a woman is to be weak.  
That's our best chance of seeking approval.  
I think that's changing so fast.  
Do you?  
I think what's interesting about this  
and the stats about pay rises and things  
is that more and more women are in positions of authority now.  
So when we're talking about these situations,  
we're not talking about women going into a man's office  
and being like,  
I don't think you should give me a pay rise like,  
but I'd really think maybe like, that's bullshit.  
It's like now we're more likely to be talking to other women  
and other women generally,  
and these are massive generalizations.  
Cause as I say, I know some good friends like you,  
like my mate Penny, who are very direct.  
And I've got people who are very uncomfortable being direct.  
And I don't think people should pretend to be otherwise, right?

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You do you and see if it works for you.  
But I think generally women are like,  
I know that being nice and kind and friendly,  
it's not bullshit.  
It's actually important emotional intelligence  
and it's how you build connections with people.  
Like nobody likes dickheads.  
Nobody likes people who are rude, who don't listen,  
who go in and demand things.  
I also don't want to be a dickhead.  
But I'm not suggesting for a minute that you're one of those people.  
But what I mean is, I reject the binary.  
But what I'm saying is, so we've called it weak language  
with a pejorative term when actually all it means is,  
you ask for things nicely,  
you respect the person who you're talking to.  
And I am sorry that my email is late  
because it probably was annoying for you that my email was late  
because you were probably waiting for it.  
And it's okay for me to acknowledge that it doesn't make me weak.  
And I was thinking about it  
because I'm thinking about everything through the prism of football at the moment.  
Images went viral of the Matildas  
after the game on Monday night, Denmark game,  
going up and comforting their opponents.  
Everyone was going, isn't that lovely?  
Women are so nice.  
And the thing is, is that to me,  
that was this absolute show of female strength that it's best, right?  
Because they're on the field, they leave nothing behind.  
The competitiveness is up to 11.  
They are playing hard, they're making no excuses.  
But afterwards, they treat each other with empathy, understanding and kindness.  
And that's not a weakness, it's a strength.  
Like, it shouldn't be like that's different from the men.  
It's like, that's what the men should be doing too.  
You know what I mean?  
I think we have a default of believing  
that because something is masculine, it's correct.  
And that women are doing things the wrong way.  
Whereas I feel like there's a lot about the way women communicate  
that you're exactly right, Holly, men can learn from.  
Yeah, especially if they're dealing with female bosses  
when they're asking for a pay rise.

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I'm going to put forward something that when we were talking about this in a meeting earlier, someone who was in that meeting said, like, I have to get respect from my team. And if I'm like, hey, if you wouldn't mind, but you're probably busy, but is it OK? And she said, they just walk on her if she tries to do that. They walk all over her. So she needs to be direct. That 100% language does not serve her in what she's trying to do. But I don't think that being direct has to mean being rude, what I was saying before, but it has been interpreted that way. It's like, just be like, I don't care, do it. I don't think very many, like, emotionally intelligent workers these days are going, oh, I really want to work for her. I'm not suggesting for a second that the person we were talking to was saying that, but there's a middle ground there of understanding. We're in furious agreement. I don't know why you keep making it a binary that either you have to be, hey, if you wouldn't mind or like, do it, bitch, we're not talking about that. We're just talking about the fact that always using this apologetic language for asking for what you want or have paid for or deserve or respect, that that's not always good for women. I think it's not always effective. I think it needs to be acknowledged that for a lot of women, we get told, use this strong language, stop caveatting every request, every request, just be direct. And I think what this acknowledges that I find really validating is that a lot of us have had terrible experiences when that happens. So if I have gone into a situation and gone, OK, I'm going to leave all my language at the door that softens it and is a bit more emotional. I'm going to leave all of that. I'm going to be direct. I've had experiences where I've done that and the response is, whoa, you know what I mean, because you go to the other extreme. I've been on the receiving end of both of those sides of you and it's back to that extremes, like there's a middle ground. I don't think you have to be. But I think women are struggling with that. Like you say, there's a middle ground. I think it's really hard to find that middle ground and women are struggling with the fact that if we're really direct, often people like, whoa, didn't see that coming from you. If we're not direct, we get a better outcome. We feel like we're not getting what we want.

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Like it's really because what people really don't respond to is in authenticity, right? Yeah.

So the reason why the Karen explodes is actually because she's spent her whole life like denying how she feels.

Whereas if you actually are genuinely sorry that your email was late or you're genuinely sorry that you're interrupting this busy person who's working behind the counter or whatever to ask about something, that's not weak.

That's just being authentic and connecting, right?

If direct is your language and you can do it well and you can wield that tool well and it gets results for you, then great.

But you can't pretend to be that if you're not.

That's what I think I've learned, that if I am not a direct communicator, it does not come naturally for me to be direct.

I remember thinking at school when I try and stand up for myself, as soon as I tried to stand up for myself, I'd hear the words come out and be like, oh, I sound really aggressive.

I actually don't know how to do it.

And so if what's natural for me is to like use that tempered language.

If it's working for you, everyone should do them.

The point is be aware that if it's not working for you and people aren't respecting you and listening to you and perhaps taking you seriously and you're not getting what you want, maybe you do need to moderate your language.

If you're getting everything you want by apologising as the first word of every sentence or being very, this is probably a terrible idea.

But I was just thinking you've probably already thought of it.

But like the example you used before of not this, but I actually love that.

I don't think that's weakness.

I think that's saying I've got an idea, but I don't necessarily think that my idea is perfect, but it's the beginning of something and it opens a dialogue and it allows people to bounce.

Being really like, I think this, just so that you could win it, which nobody here does, but like, you're doing it at a time.

But in meetings, I, that's why I actually love a bit more weak language from you and this podcast, Holly Wainwright.

I love brainstorming with women, because that's how women approach a brainstorm. Me too.

Not this, this isn't quite right, but how about this?

And then you get to this amazing place and it also means there's no ego in sharing opinions and you're happy for the best idea to win.

Whereas sometimes with those more direct people, you feel like it's not democratic. So my point is just that you do because you're weak.

My point is just everything very personal.

There are female traits that are actually strengths and we need to stop telling women to be less emotionally intelligent, because I think we're great.



## [Transcript] Mamamia Out Loud / 'Lonely-Kid' Content. Heartwarming Or Creepy?

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There's a genre of viral content that has emerged over the last five or so years that's been dubbed Lonely Kid content.

Have you heard of Lonely Kid?

I hadn't until this week, but then I recognised it as soon as I saw the term

I know. So these are the videos and posts that are based on scenarios that you'll see on social where a Lonely Kid is cheered up by someone in the kid's life who does a post on social media and asks people to show up for the kid.

So the classic form of Lonely Kid content is the birthday party that no one shows up to.

The mum or the grandmother, usually a female relative, will create a post about how their child is heartbroken.

So we're sitting at the park for JJ's birthday party, we got everything ready.

His party started half an hour ago.

He had literally zero people show up for his birthday.

And what happens next is that either the post goes viral or the media might cover it and then adults step in to show their support.

So strangers might show up at the pizza place where the Bummer Birthday Party is being held and spontaneously sing to the child or bring presents exactly to a choreographed dance or millions of strangers might offer their birthday wishes in the comments. An article in NYMAG this week looked at this phenomenon and questioned whether it's actually a terrible thing.

It says the birthday party formula has been so widely used that some commenters are starting to assume that mums are staging these viral stunts by not inviting anyone to the party in the first place.

So this article speaks about this particular story that's gone viral this week about a kid going door to door in his neighborhood.

I think he's just moved in and rang his neighbor's doorbell to say,

I just wanted to see if you if you knew any kids around like

eleven or twelve, maybe because I need I need I need some friends like really bad.

And the neighbor had one of those door cans.

So it was on video.

What the neighbor then did, seemingly without permission, is took that video and turned it into this hot, warming piece of content or heart wrenching that was like, here's a local kid in my neighborhood.

He's got no friends. He really needs friends.

It went viral.

And then the neighbor did a go fund me for the kid,

which ended up raising over thirty seven thousand dollars,

if you're fifty thousand dollars Australian, to be used for anything the kid wants.

Is this a good thing or a bad thing?

Like, firstly, the kids haven't given their consent,

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even if it's your own kid.

If you're five year old kid, how's he going to feel about having something on the Internet that says how lonely he is?

I think it's a terrible outcome for the child.

I don't think there is any way in which this actually combats loneliness.

So we know that Gen Z as the loneliest generation, in part because of social media connections, replacing real relationships. So it's somewhat ironic that we do these social media campaigns to tackle an issue that cannot be solved with social media.

And as a kid who was bullied and I remember being in the car with my dad in year eight and saying, dad, I have absolutely no friends.

And he'd list family members and I was like, that's not helpful.

Had my family just on behalf of parents, there is nothing more heartbreaking than when your kid tells you that. And it just clenches your heart.

But had my family tried to, a, fix it for me and B, make that issue public.

I cannot think of anything more humiliating.

I think it misses the point, right?

Because I can't argue in any way that it's fine for parents and neighbors and, you know, random strangers to invade children's privacy and humiliating them on the Internet.

Like, that's not cool. If that's what's happening, I suspect it's not.

Well, it depends what you define as humiliation.

Well, what Claire was just saying, like, here's Claire.

She's got no friends come to a birthday party.

Could be defined as humiliation, right?

I can't argue that that's fine.

But I suspect that these kids are usually in on the conversation.

In on the conversation. What do you mean by that?

I find it unlikely that parents are just taking a video of their daughter in the car and then putting it on the Internet without any conversation.

But do you think a kid can give informed consent about how that process will end?

I don't know enough about the individual cases of this and how old they all are.

My point is, on an individual level, agree, not really cool.

I'm not going to argue that it's great to humiliate lonely children on the Internet.

But I think what we're missing the point of is this isn't about the individual kid.

This is about an umbrella about kindness and inclusion, right?

And I mean, that seems to be the theme, actually, of this podcast.

Now, I think about it.

But I think what this content is supposed to do, because everybody loves it.

That's why it goes viral.

They watch it, their heartstrings tweak, their eyes filled with tears.

They go, oh, it's so great that all those people in that village got together

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and went to the pizza place and gave the kid a...

It's meant to do that.

It's meant to encourage kindness and thinking about people who are left out.

I think that that side of it is probably pretty good.

Because when I was a kid, nobody really talked about the fact that some kids didn't get invited to birthday parties.

The kid who didn't have any friends was just a sad loser.

He didn't have any friends, you know what I mean?

And I think that there is more awareness now of that fact.

And it's probably because of content like this.

To me, it speaks to two different issues.

The first is about the mother.

And it's usually the mother, the mother's desire to fix things for her child because that's all you want to do, right?

When your child says, I've got no friends, all you want to do is just, well, let's quickly make you feel better.

Let's rally some friends stat.

Exactly.

And you are going to come on Saturday, are you?

You really are going to come.

You're not going to stand him up.

I'm very empathetic about that.

And then the other thing is that it's important to say that, you know, I know that this article said that some of these are being staged.

This kid didn't ask to have \$37,000 raised for him.

And in many cases, so there's, you know, one that I was watching, you know, people say, how can I send a gift?

Can I do this?

Can I send money?

And they say, no, no, no, no, no, we don't want any more attention.

It was just a moment where I felt heartbroken for my child.

And I wanted to share that and feel like I wasn't the only person because that pain felt too much to bear just on my own.

So that's why I put it on social media.

I didn't want a result from it.

So there's obviously a spectrum of all different experiences, because I think that some of the most difficult moments of parenting are the ones that you can't share.

And it comes back to that thing that we talk about all the time about sharing and it's like, what's your experience and what's your child's experience?

So how much of this is the experience of a parent?

No one's coming to my child's birthday party.

I'm gutted. How do I manage this with his privacy in the future?

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I think it's interesting what you say, Holly, about how years and years ago, the weird kid at your school with no friends was just the weird kid with no friends.

I think what we're seeing and what this whole trend attests to is there are more lonely kids now than there were.

Yeah, because of social media.

The irony of all of this is there are more lonely kids because of the disconnection that social media fosters.

And I think turning this into a thing where it's like, here's a lonely child, it's OK.

They will rally the internet to create some form of fake intimacy.

That's kind of the entire problem.

And the reality is forming actual social connections is a really slow process.

You can't cut it into a short video.

There's no formula and you can't just be like everybody.

You're being too literal about the idea that like, oh, they've recruited 200 people to come to the pizza place.

So now he's got 200 friends.

That's not what it's trying to do.

What actually makes a difference to happiness is community and connection.

And what that's actually a demonstration of is a community coming together to make a kid feel good on their birthday.

I don't think anyone's pretending this issue is fixed now.

I think it's basically sending a message to the world that we need to show up for each other and really see how that can be bad.

There's a lot of really negative viral content out there.

And I think this is the least of it.

I do reckon that the people at the center of this, there are really bad outcomes that none of us are aware of in the moment.

So anybody going viral for a short period of time and then no longer being viral, that is not a good experience for anyone's mental health.

I remember being obsessed with the story of Quaidan Bales.

Do you remember him?

He was nine when he went viral.

He lives with dwarfism and his mum took a video in her car of him being really distressed after a day of school.

His story went viral.

He walked out onto the field with the Indigenous All Stars team.

And that got me.

I thought it was so beautiful.

That's an example of this.

Well, then his family started raising money to take him to Disneyland.

And that's when relentless, vile trolling started and people started to accuse him of being an actor.

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Yeah, I remember Miranda Devine like tweeted being like, he's an actor. He's actually 18, pretending to be a child. And that had really bad consequences for that family. Then there was so we can never try and do anything good because there are bad people. Well, I just think the idea is that social media isn't the way to solve loneliness. Like you can't put a bandaid over this and that we just need to be aware that we feel this discomfort at the problem of loneliness. So we go, what's a quick, easy way I can solve this from behind my computer? And he's like, loneliness, a hundred percent huge issue, especially for children. We actually need to talk about the real ways to address this. I know, but it's flashy and don't give us as nice feelings. But that's the whole point that I'm trying to make. This is awareness raising. That's what it is. What can I, as an individual, no one is going to talk about that about solving loneliness, but I can send a message to say, hey, buddy, chin up. Like sending you love from Australia. I think we're tricking ourselves into thinking that that does anything. It can be and not. And I also think no one is going to talk about kids' loneliness without some examples to point to. Like I agree with you. Like everything you're saying is smart and right about the individual impact of this. And it's not something that should be just broadly encouraged. But I think if you look at it more as like a campaign, I think it can only do good. I've got a recommendation before we go. Now, I've just read this book. It's called Girl in a Pink Dress. It's by Kylie Needham. And it's like it's a small, quiet book. It's thin, like literally thin book. It's a novel. It's the absolute opposite of like a flashy, zeitgeisty. Everybody's talking about this book, right? It's a small, quiet book, but it's getting stellar reviews because it's a first novel by this writer, Kylie Needham. She's a screenwriter. She's got a long, like stellar career in screenwriting. And it's about this young female artist who's at art school and starts a relationship with her lecturer, who's like a famous Australian artist from a long line of famous Australian artists. And he shines his light on her and she loves it and they form a relationship. Now, you might think, well, I know where that's going, but actually that

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isn't where it goes.  
So that's fascinating in itself.  
The plot is beautiful and small and full of all this love.  
And it's just so interesting.  
Sex, all the rest of it.  
She's really talented.  
The main protagonist is really talented.  
So then it explores like what love does to your ambition.  
Does it become in service of his?  
We've heard so many times about artists, creative works, that the  
Pram in the hallway is the enemy of art and that, you know, there can't be  
too big creative forces in a family.  
It examines all that, but just in this really small, beautifully written way.  
Interestingly, if you're interested in that art world, which I know nothing  
about, and I love reading books set in worlds that I know nothing about  
and feeling like really immersed in them.  
And Kylie Needham's partner is Ben Quilty, who's a big famous Australian artist.  
So she knows of what she writes.  
They've been together for a couple of decades.  
They've got a couple of kids.  
So she knows that world.  
She knows what the rich collectors are like and how a bad critique can destroy  
an artist and all that kind of stuff.  
And it's all in there and it's just beautiful.  
And it's called Bill and the Pink Troops.  
I'd seen it around.  
And then the writer was coming and doing a book event in my local area.  
And I was like, I haven't heard about that.  
So I started talking to people and they'd done it in their book club.  
And then so, yeah, I read it.  
If you're looking for something else to listen to you on yesterday's  
subscriber episode, we spoke about this one rule that Christopher Nolan,  
who's the director of Oppenheimer and Batman and lots of different films,  
has on his set that he says is an absolute game changer in terms of creativity.  
A really interesting conversation.  
Claire, Alfie and I had a great chat about it.  
There's a link in the show notes.  
Thank you for listening to Australia's number one news and pop culture show.  
This episode was produced by Susanna Makin and Tali Blackman,  
the executive producer of Tulissa Bazaar's with audio production by Leah Porges.  
Bye. Bye.  
Shout out to any Mamma Mia subscribers listening.  
If you love the show and you want to support us,  
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## **[Transcript] Mamamia Out Loud / 'Lonely-Kid' Content. Heartwarming Or Creepy?**

There's a link in the episode description.