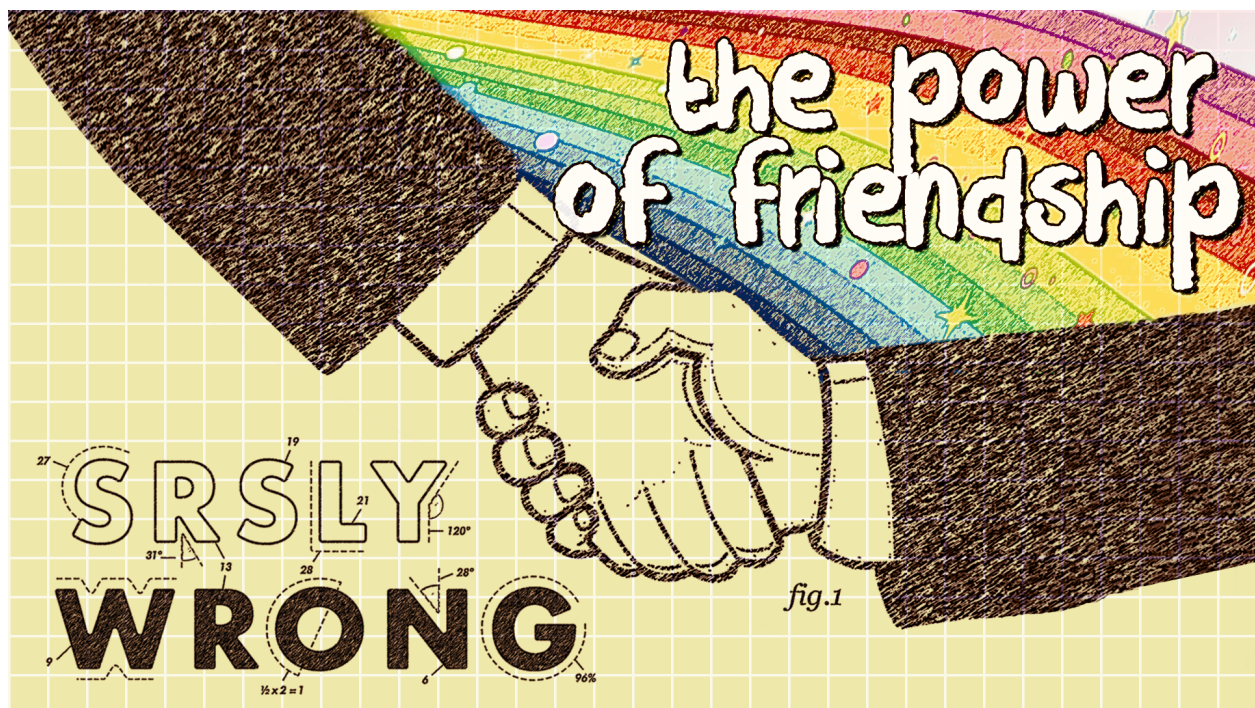


Aaron

Warning: Friendship is good for your health. Those with insufficient social ties have 4.2 times higher risk of catching a cold. Half the chance of recovering from depression, are six times more likely to die in the six months following a heart attack, Have increased risks of cancer, diabetes, and stroke in old age. Have higher blood pressure, worse hormone function, weaker immune systems, increased inflammation and double the chance of dying an early death.

That's the power of friendship, folks. And that's, uh, your warning for today.



SRSLY WRONG Episode 191

The Power of Friendship

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This Week's Theme Song by [Far Flowers](#).

Narrator

Last time on SRSLY WRONG... The hero is on the ropes. The villain of the story has rigged Manhattan with explosive devices, and has captured our hero, who is powerless to stop the villain of the story from hitting the switch.

Villain

(Evil Laugh) I'm going to DESTROY Manhattan.

Hero

No, no! I- I-

Villain

And you're going to watch me do it...

Hero

The villain of the story... Are you little Petey Maxwell, who went to Wrongtown Elementary? It's me, Skyler Janze.

Villain

Skyler Janze.. ? I remember... (we fade to a dreamlike memory)

Taunting Group of Children

(chanting) Petey is a loser. Petey is a loser. Petey is a loser.

Taunting Child 1

You don't have any friends, Petey. Petey has no friends. Get out of here! No friends. Ha ha ha! You're stupid. Petey.

Taunting Child 2

You got no friends. Why don't you run and cry to your friends about it. Oh, yeah. You don't have any!

Taunting Child 1

No one's here to back you up, Petey. Why is that..? Oh! Oh, yeah! Because you have literally no friends!

Taunting Child 2

Unlike us, we have friends with each other. Not like you. Friendless.

(Petey is sobbing)

Skyler

Hey, you guys, stop! Petey's My friend.

Taunting Child 1

Skyler?

Skyler

That's right. We're friends here. Come here... I'll put my arm around you, Petey. We're friends. You get out of here, you bullies!

Taunting Child 1

Petey's got a friend? Oh, yuck.

Taunting Child 2

Okay, whatever.

Skyler

It'll be alright, Petey. They're gone. They're gone now.

(end of flashback)

Hero

And then you transferred out of the school. After that, I never saw you again.

Villain

You saved my life that day, Skyler. You changed me. I'm not going to burn down Manhattan.

Hero

You won't? You won't!

Villain

Not if I have a friend like you. You'll be my friend... I'll untie you.

Hero

Yeah. Yeah, sure. Great.

Villain

Alright... Let me just do that.

Untying sounds.

Hero

Cool. Well.

Villain

(chuckles) Oh, yeah, that's pretty great. Not- Not destroying Manhattan.

Hero

Totally. Yeah, I was against that, so it's good.

Villain

What are you-? What are you doing now?

Hero

Oh, aren't you gonna, like, turn yourself in for the kidnapping and other crimes or-?

Villain

No, I had a- I had a change of heart.. and redeemed by the power of friendship, so...

Hero

Okay. Yeah... Alright..

Villain

Just thought I'd tag along with you.

Hero

Oh, yeah?

Villain

It's been a long time. We should catch up.

Hero

Yeah! Maybe. Yeah. My husband's kind of got a thing tonight. It's his birthday, his friends are over and stuff, so it's probably gonna like...

Villain

Oh so, like none of your friends.. coming?

Hero

Uhh... A few, but...

Villain

Oh, that's great. That means that I can come with you.

Hero

Oh... Kinda... Hm, sure. What the heck? Hey. Yeah, why don't you come on...

Villain

Yeah! (grunts in approval)

Hero

I'm already sort of a plus one, but we'll see how it goes

NARRATOR

45 MINUTES LATER

Villain

(to party guests)

Oh, yeah. And then I said, if you don't obey my every command in this romantic relationship, I will smother you and destroy the city in which you were born. (laughs)
What, no laughs? What? That's one of my best stories... Oh, tough crowd, tough crowd...

Husband

Hey, Hero, can we, just come over here, help me open a bottle of wine?

Hero

Sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Husband

Your friend, that you brought with, is kind of freaking out all the other guests. I don't know why you invited him.

Hero

(sighs) Yeah, I don't know. He's- He's a nice guy. He- He's- He doesn't really know what he's saying. He's- he's sort of being *redeemed* right now?

Husband

Okay. Right.

Hero

He was going to blow up Manhattan but then I reminded him of the power of friendship.

Husband

Riiight.

Hero

And then he asked if he could tag along. I didn't know what to say, but I was sort of worried that if I just let him be by himself...

Husband

Okay, it sounds more like a hostage situation than a friendship. You know, I hate it when you take your work home, try to be a hero about everything...

Hero

I just- He can be redeemed. He's being Redeemed.

Husband

Maybe... He can be, But can you do that on your own time? Like my friends are judging both of us on who we've brought here. Like, I hear what you're saying, but I don't know if this is the right venue for that.

Hero

(sighs) Yeah, you're probably right that people think that we're like, co-signing, what he's saying...

Husband

Yeah.

Hero

I don't know... If I call him out, I think it could be worse. I don't know what to...

Narrator

Will our hero kick him out of the party? Can their marriage survive that rampant workaholism? And will the villain of the story be redeemed with the power of friendship? Keep listening to SRSLY WRONG to find out...

—

Shawn

Hey everybody, welcome back to the SRSLY WRONG podcast. We are your hosts, the Wrong Boys~. My name is Shawn.

Aaron

I am Aaron.

Shawn

Do you mind if I tell you my high level film analysis about Star Wars Episode IV A New Hope?

Aaron

Absolutely.

Shawn

Okay, so first of all, this is just a side point, but the reason the stormtroopers always miss is because they don't have passion for their work. It's just a job to them. The rebels always escape because they have the life-spark within them. They're not, you know, like the stormtroopers are like, oh, I want to get home to my family at the end of this. Who cares? We're- They're just missing a lot. But anyways, that's a side point.

Aaron

Makes sense.

Shawn

The lesson of Star Wars Episode IV, the big event when the Death Star is destroyed, when all hope is lost, because Han Solo returns. What happened there was Han Solo was, you know, bottom right on the four-scale political chart. He's an anti-authoritarian capitalist, right. But the power of friendship through meeting Luke and Leia and Threepio and the whole gang, the power of friendship moves him to bottom left. And that's like the deus ex machina of Star Wars Episode IV. So it's a big tribute to the power of friendship by George Lucas.

Aaron

Yeah, or at least bottom center, I think. I'm not sure if he goes all the way to the left, but I do like most of your analysis. I think it's great.

Shawn

(Han Solo Bottom Right Voice) I'm going to stop this big government death machine. The private sector would never build something like this.

Aaron

But yeah, I mean, like the phrase the power of friendship, I think might call to mind for people like, oh, that's, that's trite, or it's a silly thing or something, but it's actually just like a basic, obvious, thing that people have a massive social influence on one another and people that we know, like, care about and are invested in a continuing relationship with will have an even higher influence on that person. But also a huge power in friendship because it's two friends... Having two people working on something together is actually more than twice as powerful than just having one person working on something, because not only do you have the efforts of two individuals, you also have the special extra something that comes out of the relationship between them, the newness that is generated through the interaction.

Shawn

Yeah, the output is greater than the sum of its parts. You know, it's clear that friendship has literal power in multiple distinct ways that can be proven and shown very clearly.

Aaron

Hm

Shawn

But because the power of friendship is this thing that's been repeated through corny media enough that we built a callus to that wisdom, you know, that I just feel like the sense of like, oh, the power of friendship. It's like carebears or something. And like, I'm six years old. I want to prove I'm not a baby. But know what? I'm an adult, and I'm going to admit and acknowledge and analyze the power of friendship. I don't need to prove I'm not a baby... I know for a fact that I'm a full grown adult.

Aaron

Yeah it is. It is a weird holdover from being... like a toddler rejecting babyhood. You're holding on to that, like, toddler-level analysis of "I'm not a baby" carrying it through into adulthood to be like, oh, "that's something that's not worth talking about", "I don't think that's worthy of scholarly study."

Shawn

That's interesting- When you think about very serious people who are, like, completely

committed to like the seriousness of- of who they are. Like, I'm a business person, or I'm a revolutionary.. or..

Aaron

Yeah.

Shawn

Like a very, very serious person... Part of that is the hangover from toddlerdom... Trying to reject babyhood. You know? In like a business person who refuses to laugh at himself, refuses to play with ideas, explore, or be seen as naive. I think that's where you particularly see it in politics, right?

Aaron

Hm, yeah.

Shawn

...Is people are so afraid to be naive, you have to have always already studied everything and like to be revealed as naive is to be revealed as a baby. But our toddler selves inside are like, "no, I'm not a baby, I'm a big boy." (laughs) But the- but the ultimate way to just be a big boy is to talk about poo and, like, just lean into it like you're not a baby, you're an adult. You're- Congratulations, you're 24. We're going to build a revolution. Let's do it.

Aaron

Yeah, and I mean, but like it becomes.

Shawn

Let's hear you say poo poo.

Aaron

When these kinds of things come up in the real world and you're unwilling to engage with them seriously because you think it's baby talk or, like, below you in some sense. And I think even like I'm- and we are- probably guilty of this to some extent that like a lot of our analysis of like various political events and happenings in the world, lacks a substantive angle of taking the power of friendship into account, like when we're talking

about the way ideas spread, or like, how groups of politically active people recruit people into their ways of thinking, into activism, into politically motivated actions for all kinds of outcomes, from good to bad. If we don't have an analysis of the role that the power of friendship plays in all of that, and building all these movements, and maintaining them and allowing them to function, then yeah, we're going to have bad analysis.

Shawn

Yeah. I mean, the power of friendship is so powerful that there's no better way to recruit for anything. Building friendships and bonds between people. It can make people do things that they wouldn't otherwise do. Friendship is powerful on one hand, in the sense that it allows for like a social magnetism where the relationships between people can alter their actions in relation to each other. And it's also powerful to the individual, as friendship is something that *socially nourishes* human beings where they're capable to function effectively and feel valued and esteemed in the world.

FRIENDFUL PAPA AND FRIENDLESS BOY

Papa

Hey, son, you got a minute to talk with your old man?

Boy

(sighs) Yeah, I guess so. What do you want to talk about?

Papa

Ooh, grumpy teenage vibes. Love it.

Aaron

Yeah, and I sure love you making me self-conscious about it. Thanks.

Papa

It's a tough time. Lots of hormones and stuff. Forget I said anything. Bad joke, bad dad joke. I was just wondering. How are things going with your friends? Like, I noticed that

you're spending a lot more time around the house watching YouTube videos.

Boy

Yeah, I don't know, my friends, they're all stupid. I don't need friends. Stupid. Everyone at school is stupid, I hate it.

Papa

Whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa. Son, have we not talked about the power of friendship before? And the damaging effects of patriarchy on young men like yourselves' view of friendship...

Boy

Uhh... Is this like Care Bears? Power of friendship?

Papa

No, this isn't Care Bear, son. This is hard science. Triumphant science. Figuring out the material reality of our situation.

Boy

Okay, dad.

Papa

Okay, look, the New York University psychologist, Niobe Way. She did research on friendships among male teenagers, like yourself. And she found that boys and girls are equally likely to talk about sort of personal feelings with their friends, have those nourishing, mutually supportive relationships, up until about the age of 15, when boys start reporting that they don't have very many friends, but they also don't need very many friends.

Boy

Yeah, that's me. Don't need them.

Papa

Well, and I guess this comes from some sort of outdated idea of, you know, the tough individual man, like you're becoming a man, and you want to *be a man*, you know? And

like, I don't need friends. I'm an island. I'm by myself.

Boy

Yeah.

Papa

But no man is an island. No teen is an island. Because you know the exact same age that teenage boys start reporting that they have less friends and they don't need friends is the same time when boys suicide rates spike to four times as much as girls

Boy

Four? Wow.

Papa

There's an isolation epidemic in the most developed countries around the world, especially around men. You know, adult white heterosexual men have the fewest friends of any group in America. That shows up in ways, of like, after a divorce. The rates of illness and early death for men are much, much, higher than women. It's because they don't have these supportive, nurturing, emotional friendships. They disproportionately rely on their wives. So after a divorce, or if an older man's wife dies, they tend to be faced with sort of the stark option between trying to move on and find another relationship right away so they can have more support in their life, or, frankly, get ill and often die much younger than women after the death of their husband. It's a horrible thing, and it's just rooted in this sort of idea that men always have to be strong, they can't rely on other people, and that there's something sort of girly about having an emotional connection. Well, number one, there's nothing wrong with being a little girly sometimes, but number two, it's not even girly to have friends. It's human. It's foundational to be a human being, to have friends... Now, I remember I used to have Tom and Donald would come over pretty much every weekend. You guys would play video games, that sort of stuff. What happened with you guys?

Boy

I don't know, we just stopped. We just stopped hanging out. Tom's pretty stupid, but maybe Donald would be alright.

Papa

This is just a weird thing- Men's friendships tend to be more what they call like a shoulder to shoulder friendship. You know, two men doing something at the same time, like playing a sport or a video game or something like that, where women tend to have what you'd call like a 'face to face' relationship. It's a relationship about communication and stuff like that. So women are more likely to like, talk to their friends on the phone than men are. I mean, even just giving Donald a ring and asking him how he's doing, you might be surprised at how good you feel afterwards just to have people that you can open up to and just know that you have support, that you're not alone.

Boy

Fine.

Papa

And look, I know I'm your dad peeking my head in your door, not being cool like I'm not your dad with sunglasses.

Boy

You're tellin me.

Papa

I'm here talking about social science around the epidemic of loneliness and how toxic masculinity robs young men like yourself from the nourishing, mutually supportive emotional relationships that all human beings need and is our very nature... I know that it's not "cool." I'm not like skateboarding in here with pizza for you, but I think it's important.

Boy

Okay, dad, I got it. Thank you, I appreciate it.

Papa

And now, look, if you don't appreciate it, talk to Donald about it. You know, "my dad is annoying me with all these stats." Are your parents annoying too Donald? How can I support you in that?.

Boy

I'm not going to say that. "How can I support-" I'm not saying that, dad.

Papa

Okay, well, I mean, you don't have to say anything, but just... planting seeds. Planting seeds. That's what I'm here to do. Planting little seeds. I'm going to close the door. Leave you to your computer. Do you want me to bring in a cordless phone in case you want to be calling Donald? Or you can come out for it, but could bring it in, too.

Boy

Yeah, whatever. Bring it.

Papa

That's what I thought. You want the cordless phone to call your friend and be less lonely. That's incredible. (to self) Such a good dad. Okay, I'll be right back.

—

Shawn

So there's this sort of crude social Darwinist idea of evolution... that because in nature there's the 'survival of the fittest' species. Sometimes people will say, well, in human relations, the survival of the fittest individuals pushes human evolution forward. Human life is a competition between all human beings to reproduce more, and the people who are most fit to evolve do so at the expense of others, and that you pass down sort of like your specific bloodline. And even in some of the most ridiculous versions of this, you pass on your specific political beliefs. This, oh no, conservatives are having more babies than liberals. Like liberalism is going to die out. Like it's a- it's a weirdly common thing to hear people say. But in human evolution, we didn't evolve and get this far, we didn't build bridges and go to space and create libraries and create taxonomy for all other species and mourn the loss of biodiversity and so on, because we were so busy competing with each other to reproduce. The real reason that human beings have been able to become *the most influential species on the biosphere*, and one of the most populous and complex species that has done a lot of incredible things, was actually not through competition with one another, but through the opposite- mutual aid- working together and specifically, honestly, the power of friendship. The power of friendship is

what brought humanity through the darkest times in human history, the toughest times, the times that we were closest to being wiped out as a species. What brought us through there was human beings supporting one another, befriending one another, even from, you know, different sort of like, tribal groups, like our capacity to build friendships with each other is one of the roots of our evolutionary success.

Aaron

Yeah. If you're talking about evolutionary fitness, ability to survive and go on for as long as possible, like long enough to reach reproductive age, long enough to have successful future generations raise them. Etc. The stuff that makes that more possible isn't how strong one person is, or how fit one person is, how great one person is at building shelter for them and their family. The thing that really raises evolutionary fitness, the thing that gives us such an edge, is, well, a lot of things obviously, our intelligence, opposable thumbs, ability to make tools, all this kind of stuff. But all of that stuff only gets you so far by yourself as an individual. But with the power of friendship, with the power of social ties with people that you trust, care about who you have their back and they have your back, that kind of stuff acts as such an amplifier for all these other great abilities we have, and makes it so that it's actually possible to utilize those abilities to the highest degree possible. Because, like, you need other people's help sometimes to do most things. Like there's very few things, especially in a state of nature out in the wild, but like there's just very few things you can do all by yourself that are sustainable or will last for very long.

Shawn

It seems to me, like most everything that human beings have ever accomplished in history that was awesome was a result of people working together with more than one person. Like there's this sort of mythological idea of sort of like the lone genius or something like that, or like the great man theory of history. Maybe a more accurate way of looking at it would be that genius is something that happens in groups. Maybe the great group theory of history would be more accurate, but even something like you could say, okay, Isaac Newton has invented this incredible new way of seeing the world- physics. What makes an individual's admittedly really genius contribution to science or discourse or philosophy or whatever, so important to the development and movement of the human species, is the collaborative process that happens after that. That is, other people reviewing it, giving feedback, developing it, passing it on. We are a group

species and we have evolved to be a group species. And if we had evolved to be an individualistic species, I think we'd look really, really, different.

Aaron

Yeah, actually. Oxford psychologist Robin Dunbar, people have probably heard of the phrase Dunbar's number before. It's like, oh, you can have like a little bit over a hundred strong social connections, like we have about that many slots in our head to be like, this is my group, this is my people. Robin Dunbar, their work in evolutionary science actually suggests that the neural power that's necessary to keep track of those complex relationships, the fact that we can have over 100 complex relationships with people and, like, how much brain power that takes, is why we have such large brains compared to other mammals, and they also found that one of the best ways to predict the size of a primate's brain without actually measuring it is to look at the size of the primate's social group. So this theory that the size of our social group and the fact of our heightened ability to make friends, being responsible for brain size is something that you can generalize across other primate species, our closest evolutionary cousins.

Shawn

So the place that we come from in human prehistory, the evolutionary trajectory that human beings are on, has been defined, in a large part, literally, by the power of friendship, literally by our capacity to easily make friends, even with strangers, for the purposes of mutual aid and community stability. The power of friendship, the ability to make friends, is as human, as fundamentally human, as part of human nature, as walking upright on two legs and having opposable thumbs. It's as fundamentally human as possessing the powers of speech and complex abstract reasoning. Part of what makes us human is our friendships.

Aaron

But also there's kind of friendships between other species, and they have social relationships, or they have mutually beneficial relationships. It's not quite the same thing as a human friendship.

Shawn

You have symbiotic relationships. And within that there's three categories mutualism, where both parties benefit, commensalism where only one species benefits

but the other is unharmed, or parasitism, where one gains at the other's expense. And you could sort of argue that mutualism and commensalism are like friendships, you know, like there's that African bird that, like, goes in crocodile's mouths and, like, eat the food from between its teeth. And the crocodile doesn't eat the bird because they get a benefit. So they have a complementary relationship. And you also sort of have like proto-friendships in primate species or intelligent mammal species like dolphins. You could argue that the sort of automation of the anthill is a type of friendship, where they've all got these complementary roles and relation to each other

Aaron

Right, right, right.

Shawn

And they're all like friends of the Queen.

Aaron

Well, I think one of the, like, crucial things that makes human friendship unique and different is we have a concept of friendship, and we think about what it means to be a good friend and what is a bad friend. And we can update what we're doing based on our ideas and have this sort of relationship between our complex reasoning abilities and our social relationships that can kind of like, ideally, help us to do them better.

Shawn

Yeah. And mean we're definitely on the same sort of continuum of consciousness, recognizing and appreciating the other, in a mutual sense.

Aaron

Yeah, it didn't spring out of nowhere like- all species before us had no mutualistic- Yeah, but.

Shawn

That's completely consistent with our sort of idea of how evolution works and where human beings come from in the universe. It's like we're on a continuum with less complex vertebrates, less complex mammals. So it makes sense that they would have sort of proto-friendships, but also that just because of some of the unique features of

our species and like you mentioned, complex thought and language, like we have much more complex and self-aware friendships. And part of our evolution in particular has been guided by these friendships. Part of the reason that we are the species that we are today is a record that goes back thousands and thousands of years of developing higher and higher capacity for complex friendships. So like what you might have, like, say, two pandas who tend to eat eucalyptus together and they might have a-

Aaron

Like they benefit each other in some way..

Shawn

Even it's just the benefit of like having a sort of, like, calming neurotransmitter released through the familiarity of having...

Aaron

Closeness of another...

Shawn

The way that we do it is just like fucking crazy compared to them. Like, you make friends with people based on music that you listen to or media that you consume, or like the workplace that you're in. And like, these are all unique human relationships that are part of like a fundamentally different way of interacting with the world, which humans just interact with the world in a fundamentally different way than any other species that we know of on Earth. And you can find continuities between us and them, and we absolutely should. We shouldn't be, like, crudely anthropocentric and be like, oh, humans are so great. We beat everyone rah r-ah. But at the same time, you've got to acknowledge that there is like a, there's a threshold that's passed where you're just like on a certain other... different level. So I think the degree and type of friendships we have are absolutely unique.

Aaron

Yeah, definitely. Earlier you said our friendships are what make us human, but in a way, the things that make us human are what make our friendships so exceptional.

Shawn

Yeah. And it's interesting to think maybe the things that make us human co-developed alongside our capacity for friendships. So like when it comes the stuff like the development of music, technology, complex thought and language. We could sort of think of them as being potentially outgrowths of the proto-humans preoccupation with the social, as an evolutionary strategy, which was really effective. And that isn't carebear stuff. That's hard science. In fact, you can think of Carebears as a sort of scientific documentary.

Aaron

Yeah, it's a bit metaphorical. Obviously the stomachs don't light up and shoot things out, but if you think about the deeper meaning, it's definitely scientific.

—

FRIENDSHIP IN NATURE

A pleasant tune starts playing. We hear the sounds of birds and other wild animals.

Shawn

The universe is absolutely full of friendship at every level in nature, starting at the smallest, we find friendship.

Aaron

Endosymbiosis theory says that eukaryotic cells, like the ones that make up our body, are a result of a union between prokaryotic cells. So every cell in our body is a group of friends. Every cell in our body is held together by friendship.

Shawn

The bodies of human beings, and rabbits, and dogs, plants... They're made up of many eukaryotic cells which work together to make a more complex living organism. They're big groups of friends.

Aaron

For every one human cell in your body. There are ten microorganisms which play a vital

role in human health. These complementary microorganisms make up 1 to 3% of your body mass, so if you weigh 200lbs, you have about 1lb of bacteria friends in your stomach, nose, intestines and mouth.

Shawn

Now that's friendship. 80 to 90% of plant species have symbiotic relationships with fungi. Most plants have fungal friends that use their mycelial networks to channel water and minerals from the soil up to the plants, and in exchange, the plants provide the products of photosynthesis to fuel the metabolism of the fungus. The plants and fungal growth have a mutualistic relationship, where they, as two cute friends, lift spoons up to each other's mouths and feed one another in a way they couldn't do alone.

Aaron

There is a bird called the Egyptian plover, which routinely flies into the mouths of crocodiles, but crocodiles don't eat them because they're friends. The plover eats pieces of food out of the crocodile's teeth, getting a meal, and the crocodile benefits by having clean teeth and looking fabulous.

Shawn

The honeyguide bird of southern Africa is a great friend to the Hasda people, a local indigenous group. The bird leads humans to beehives, changing its call to let them know when they're close. Then the Hasda people use fire to smoke the bees out of the hive, allowing them to collect honey? And while they do that, the honeyguide bird takes their share.

Aaron

Honey bees and flowers also have mutualistic relationships. The bee moves pollen from flower to flower, helping them reproduce, and the bees take pollen to the hive to produce honey. Bees and flowers are friends, and without that friendship, the thriving of both would be stifled.

Shawn

Under the sea. Clownfish and sea anemones have a mutualistic relationship. The clownfish lives on the sea anemone, eating from the scraps of the things that anemone

kills and getting protection from it, and in exchange, it keeps away parasites. That's a cute, nice little friendship.

Aaron

We find friendships in nature in every subcategory of species friendships within species, as well as friendships across species.

Shawn

Friendship is part of human nature. It's part of the nature of consciousness itself. It's part of the nature of life in the universe. And if we ever go to the stars, our destiny is to make friends out there.

Aaron

The universe is absolutely *full* of friendship.

—

Narrator

Today's episode of SRSLY WRONG is sponsored by betrayal. When you have a friend, that's the most wonderful thing in the world. Friendship makes us soar. Who are we without our friends? But from the towering heights of friendship, you can and sometimes do fall. Why does betrayal hurt so much? When you're betrayed... That can make you gripped with a feeling of a loss of control, like you've trusted someone that you shouldn't have trusted, or the feeling that you've been conspired against, that you're being acted on without your buy-in. All these things together can contribute to the feeling that you're not being valued, and that can lead to self-doubt. Betrayal. Proud sponsor of today's SRSLY WRONG.

—

(sound of clicking iPod audio decrease)

Normal Guy 1

...Let's take our earbuds out.

Normal Guy 2

Yeah, we were just listening to the podcast. We don't make the podcast. Yeah, we're outside of it. Yeah.

Normal Guy 1

I got to say, I'm really, really excited about that betrayal sketch because like, yeah.

Normal Guy 2

Shout out betrayal.

Normal Guy 1

I'm a friendship fanatic and you can't talk about the power of friendship without also talking about the power of betrayal.

Normal Guy 2

Absolutely. Yeah. Betrayal has been such a huge part of my life. I feel like every friendship I've ever had has ended in betrayal. So if they hadn't mentioned it, I would have been mad.

Normal Guy 1

Every friendship?

Normal Guy 2

Yeah, everyone.

Normal Guy 1

Wow. I think I've had maybe two betrayals ever in any serious sense.

Normal Guy 2

How many have you betrayed? Because, you know, sometimes I betray them. Sometimes they betray me.

Normal Guy 1

Oh, yeah. Probably. I'd have to think, to really think about how many betrayals I've-

Normal Guy 2

Hard to see your own betrayal sometimes, I'm very self-aware.

Normal Guy 1

But, I mean, it's obvious that, yeah, betrayal is a huge part of both our lives. And getting that shout out... Big for the betrayal community.

Normal Guy 2

Well, let's put it back on... And just the last thing I'll say, here's hoping our friendship doesn't go that way.

Normal Guy 1

Yeah. Ending in betrayal. That'd be horrible.

Normal Guy 2

...I'll put the earbuds back in.... (ipod noises)

—

Back to the discussion...

Shawn

Something that absolutely fascinates me. The PG-13, 1990s, wholesome family movie idea of “power of friendship” we’ve been sold *implies* that the power of friendship is a force for good, and that the power of friendship is why Han Solo blows up the Death Star. The power of friendship is this benevolent force of the universe that moves people towards good. “Oh, the warmth of our friendship has convinced me to renounce evil.” But that's not the case. What's fundamental to the power of friendship is the idea of power. So what is power? Is power a good thing? What makes a power legitimate or illegitimate? These are the questions underlying the *power of friendship conversation* that people aren't talking about.

Aaron

Yeah, and the Hallmark card, Disney Channel version of the-

Shawn

Mickey Mouse stuff.

Aaron

The Mickey Mouse stuff is actually, like, deeply ideological and a fucked up way by equating the power of friendship to purely goodness. Then, if you look at some pretty messed up historical examples of the power of friendship, you can immediately see that not all exercises of this power are for the good. Like, the first one that pops to mind for me is it's pretty well known the two Columbine killers were like really good friends. But not only that, that one of them likely had antisocial personality disorder, and the other one was kind of a depressed kid, who, this was the only person who would be his friend and might not have been involved in something like that, if not for the one with antisocial personality disorders' influence. So that's a pretty dark place to go, I guess. But just the power of friendship can go some pretty dark places.

Shawn

If you're ever playing Tribond. And the three clues are Disney Channel carebears Columbine, you need to shout "Power of Friendship" immediately. Get your team those points. (laughs) No, like that's a really, really fucked up example and actually made me sort of like swallow my tongue when you were saying it.

Aaron

Made my throat shake a little bit, even to just express those things.

Shawn

It's so fucked up and just absolutely devastating that that is part of human history, that there was room in society, there was such a lack of support that something like that could even ever fucking happen. It's traumatizing to be reminded of, mildly.

Aaron

Yeah

Shawn

And that's the pernicious thing about the power of friendship, is that it's a neutral power. It relates to the power between individuals. There's a hidden, sort of, history of

friendships, influence on world affairs. Who do you like and who do you not like makes a profound impact on your analysis of ideas and ethical standing. The power of friendship is part of the reason the MeToo movement needed to happen, because friends were backing their friends up.

Aaron

Yes, conspiracy of silence stuff. Or like if you think about various elite arenas of the world where getting ahead is all about who you know, it's like who your friends are. This politician sold this public works company off to some of his rich buddies. And then, like when he gets out of office, his buddies hire him. That's- all of that is the power of friendship operating in a real way in our society.

Shawn

You know, and I don't go as far as some do, but some have suggested that the real root, the real keystone oppression in society that needs to be overthrown in order to liberate everyone from everything, and I don't agree with this. I think this is a little bit over the top, but *they actually think* that the only way to abolish patriarchy, class relations, the idea of hierarchy, the ecological crisis, is to abolish the power of friendship, make friendship less powerful somehow. I think it's the wrong choice. I think a lot of these things are intersecting and that they need to be tackled in combination with each other, sort of in reference to the way that these processes interact. Like, that's my stance. But there's some that think that actually you need to completely abolish the power of friendship in order to liberate humanity and achieve universal human emancipation.

Aaron

Yeah, I don't even like placing the power of friendship alongside those other things as equal. I think it's a different type of thing. I think it's a bit of a category error.

Shawn

Yeah, totally. Absolutely. Power of friendship is more neutral. It's capable of great evil.

Aaron

Yeah.

Shawn

But a lot of things are. And if we put everything capable of great evil in the same category as these objectively oppressive structures, I think that's really a fault in our analysis. Yeah.

Aaron

Yeah, the power of friendship. Yeah. Like, it's just power. It's not an inherently unequal and unjust system like patriarchy and class society are.

Shawn

You could even say the power of friendship is present there in the proliferation of global war, the war on terror, mass surveillance, illegal occupations of other countries. You have these sort of like world leaders and military commanders who see each other in a sense, as contemporaries.

Aaron

Yeah. Well, people like even use the terminology of friendship in talking about nation states, like, is China our friend or our enemy?

Shawn

Like, a lot of politicians will say they're a friend to Israel.

Aaron

Yeah.

Shawn

So friendship can clearly cloud moral reasoning and ethical responsibility can be thrown out the window. If you're talking about people that you care about, that you consider friends that you have companionship with. How do we prevent the worst sides of the power of friendship, and emphasize the best parts of the power of friendship? Part of the power of friendship is the power that it generates. Like you're talking about being more than the sum of its parts. That's a positive power. That's like- there's the two definitions of power, right? There's *power over*, and then there's *power to*. And that type of power is the *power to*, like, but the power over needs to be criticized insofar as like one friend exercising authority over another using the power of friendship, maybe

making them act against their better interests. Like that's a sort of hierarchical use of the power of friendship. And I think that's a...

Aaron

Yeah, yeah, I think friendship itself, it doesn't lend itself very well to like a overtly hierarchical thing, but there is an influence that goes in both directions, and people either consciously or unconsciously, can misuse that influence and attempt to gain people or be manipulative for their own advantage. And, I think that, yeah, that's an attempt to leverage this mutual influence for hierarchical personal gains.

Shawn

So, human psychology and social relations are sort of like an ecosystem in the sense that a more complex set of social relations causes an increased stability in the individual, because you have a generalized, large group of people that you feel accountable to, which gives you more freedom to be an individual and not be defined by any single individual person, but by having a smaller group of people that you interact with, the people that you interact with become bigger in your world, and so therefore you're more vulnerable to have the power of friendship used against you, right?

Aaron

Right, Checks and balances on the power of friendship by having as many friends as possible. That's kind of what you're saying?

Shawn

Yeah, maybe not as many friends as possible, but there's an optimal amount to reach, and you want to have a decent amount of people that you can trust and rely on. So, yeah, you know, I've heard before about people with like, weird friendships where people are like boundary crossing stuff like that, but then they tolerate it for a while and they don't tell their other friends. It's like what other friends are for. That's the checks and balances on the power of friendship. It's too powerful to silo if someone is being a weird and bad friend.

Aaron

I think sometimes people will hide that type of stuff from their other friends because they know that they'll get called out on it and they don't want to, like...

Shawn

Yeah I think what it is, is that if you keep someone being weird to you private, then it's not real. It's just between you and them. And no one knows it. But if you tell someone else about someone being weird, then it's real. They're accountable for it. Like, it feels like you're making it real. Instead of being able to brush it aside, pretend it never happened or whatever like that. So that makes people not say things.

Aaron

Each friendship you have often like is its own little reality tunnel. Just the way you put it of telling a third party makes it real. It's like it does in the way that it gives it like a sort of social reality, that it feels so siloed off when it's just the two of you, and you can think of whatever dynamic the two people have, or it's a relationship, a friendship that's like messed up or unequal, or lightly too heavily abusive in some way. You know, your rationalizations aren't that great, and you know that it won't stand up the test of social exposure. But if you only have to deal with it when you're in the reality tunnel with that other person, it feels contained and like not part of the fullness of reality. It's like people knowing about things, making it real. In a sense..

Shawn

You're increasing the sort of intersubjectivity of what happened. And like intersubjectivity is the basis of interpreting reality, right?

Aaron

So like it's yeah, yeah, yeah. It's like it's like history is like all the things that in some sense history is all the things that actually happened. But in the other, another sense, history is all the things that people remember and talk about and like, you know, your own personal history or like history of the world, it's like-

Shawn

Oh god, yeah. I've been in multiple internet arguments where I use the word history to refer to everything that actually happened. And then someone's like, you're talking about prehistory because history is when we started recording, sorry, go on.

Aaron

So I'm like, I'm not saying all things that actually happened are less real than the things that people know about in a physical sense, but they are less real in a social sense and in a sense that's like, actually really important.

Shawn

Mr. Rogers actually really nailed it on this. He said, anything that's mentionable is manageable. He was talking about increasing the intersubjectivity of abuses of the power of friendship. Yeah.

Aaron

I mean, I think he was primarily talking about increasing the intersubjectivity of things that are internal to you and that you're not expressing to anyone. But I do think it equally well applies to things that are only between two people and you want to increase the intersubjectivity on that as well. Talking about things helps you understand them. Gives other people that chance to give feedback. Powerful thing. Talking about things. Mentioning stuff that's difficult.

—

Jazz piano plays.

Narrator

We now go back to the hero of the story as he lies in bed with his husband, reflecting on his work, attempting to redeem the villain of the story.

Hero

And you remember that night when the villain of the story was over? He's making everyone uncomfortable...

Husband

On my Birthday.

Hero

And I was so conflicted that night because I was like, okay, well, if we call the police

because of all the bombs he planted, he'll probably end up in prison and fall in with a white supremacist gang.

Husband

Yeah, make the wrong kind of friends.

Hero

He's going to be believing in '*Chinaman on boat theory*'¹ in no time. And just-- That's a worse place for him. And then if we just kick him out on the street, he's resentful, well, he still got the charges placed around the city. He might blow Manhattan up. I don't want that...

Husband

Oh, yeah.

Hero

Obviously he couldn't stay at the party... He's making everyone really uncomfortable.

Husband

What did you even do? I forget I got so drunk that night, I can't remember.

Hero

(lovingly) That's my husband. Drunk as hell. You were drunk as hell the night I met you.

Husband

Oh, come on.

Hero

I'm just poking fun. You know, teasing is an element of friendship. Well, yeah, actually, what I ended up doing was just taking him aside and saying, like, "hey, you know what.. This party is really not my scene. I'm not having a great time. Do you want to, like, go for a walk with me, maybe grab ice cream or something like that?"

¹ "*Chinaman on boat theory*" is a reference to another episode where we did a parody of paranoid anti-semitism where a single Chinese national not affiliated with the government was said to secretly control all world affairs.

Husband

Oh, yeah?

Hero

And we actually had a great conversation. He really opened up, talked through some stuff. He did have a messed up experience, obviously... (sigh) And I mean, that doesn't excuse what he did, but yeah.. So we ended up having a longer personal conversation that I really thought redeemed him and helped move him along...

Husband

Yeah that sounds like the right choice.

Hero

Yeah, but I saw him tonight at the Saint Patrick's Day thing I was telling you about.

Husband

Oh, yeah? How was that? I didn't go out. I was just drinking at home.

Hero

Well, I wasn't wearing green.

Husband

Major faux pas.

Hero

Yeah, they took it really seriously.... All around me in a circle....

We fade into a bar where Irish music is playing.

A Group of Adult Bullies

You're not wearing Greeeeeen. You're a loser. You have no friends. You're different than all of us. Aren't you wearing your green? Oh, yeah! You don't have any! Just like you have no friends! Why don't You ask your friends to bring you some green clothes so- Oh- they couldn't. No friends. They don't exist. Loser, loser. Full on. Loser. Idiot.

A Group of Adult Bullies

(chanting and goading)

Micropenis. Micropenis. Micropenis. Micropenis.

We return to the bedroom as the Hero recounts the tale...

Hero

...they were chanting “micropenis.” And he walked by and we made eye contact.

Husband

And then he stepped in and said, no, you're his friend?

Hero

No, he turned away.

Husband

What, after all that?

Hero

Yeah.

Husband

Yeah, that's disappointing, you know.

Hero

Yeah, yeah. Perfect time for him to demonstrate that villains can be redeemed and just, like, bring sort of the story whole circle, and make it sort of a feel good thing.

Husband

Yeah. It would have mirrored your moment from earlier when you were young... What you did for him...

Hero

(getting a bit upset) Yeah. He didn't. He didn't, he didn't. After everything I did for him, after taking him under my wing and to make sure that he felt that he belonged in the

world and that he wasn't alone and- and-

Husband

(tender) Honey.. Oh, honey...

Hero

And then he was given the perfect chance to show that it's worth it, that everything I do is worth it. And he's like, oh, I'm going to turn away. I don't need him. I don't need what he did for me. I don't even care about him. Ah, ugh, You know who cares, right?

Husband

It's not always going to be successful, to be the hero, to redeem people. Pure, numbers game, like, sometimes it's going to fail.

Hero

Maybe he- maybe- Maybe not everyone actually just gets redeemed in the end. Maybe sometimes they're just false starts, or they get halfway to redemption and they turn back. Or maybe redemption isn't even like a useful metric.

Husband

Yeah

Hero

Or maybe he's yet to be redeemed. Maybe my work's not done and someone else will finish it off for me. But I'm done with him. But what am I supposed to take away from this?

Husband

Always wear green on Saint Patrick's Day? No, that's too small.

Hero

(sarcastic) Ha-ha.

Husband

Oh no, don't say that you took any of that to heart. We both know those chants. Not accurate.

Hero

Oh yeah, come here. The world is too complex to use simple frameworks to understand it in all circumstances.

Husband

Yeah, and I mean, he needs a lot of self work that he has to participate in himself. You can't bestow redemption on him. It's not something he can just choose in a moment either. It's something he has to actively work at for a long time to achieve.

Hero

(sighs) Yeah, yeah. I'm just just human being. So is he.

Husband

Yeah, all heroes and villains are really just human beings in the end. The real ones, anyway. And not like movies and stuff. But.

Hero

Yeah. I don't know. I guess let's like watch The Office again or something?

Husband

Season eight?

Hero

Do you even have to ask? It's my favorite season.

Husband

Yes!! Okay, let's do it.

Narrator

Will our hero give up on trying to redeem everyone? Will the villain be redeemed? And will the hero and his husband realize that although the US office is a *pretty* good show, it just pales in comparison to the British original. And if you want an American program

that's significantly better than the Office, Parks and Recreation actually just is better. Will they realize this? Tune in later to find out...

—

Shawn

Let's talk about the generative power of friendship, the whole idea that two heads are better than one, or that sort of like a network of people are going to have better results. Why does friendship generate more than the sum of its parts, when it's at its best?

Aaron

Say you needed a creative solution to a problem. There's a problem that no solution yet exists, so you need people to brainstorm... throw out different ideas and determine their feasibility. So in one scenario, you get three people who are great at having ideas and you put them in three separate rooms, and you tell them to write down all their ideas on a piece of paper.

Shawn

Oh, we've done this before. It's the three man experiment.

Aaron

And then and then you get a list of all their ideas, and you have the sum total of three minds, three creative minds working on this problem. The other version of the experiment, you get the three people to write down their own little brainstorming session, just like you did. Then you put them all together in a room, and you have them read out the ideas to one another, give each other feedback on the ideas, and see if they can come up with any more new ideas after they've had those conversations. So, like, social interactions we can see in this example, obviously they're stimulating, they're generative. And that is.. just an observable fact.

Shawn

Yeah. So you have, like, one person suggests an idea that inspires another counter idea. So then all these like extra ideas are being created in this process of idea feedback back and forth. And-

Aaron

Yeah, we all have unique brains, and associational webs of concepts in our heads. So when you throw out all your ideas to the other two and they throw out their ideas to you, all of those ideas mix together, and all three of your brains, and the new ideas that come from those associations go out of your mouths again. And then the whole process repeats, and it's a thing that's happening between the group, and it's not a thing that's happening in any one of the individuals. You're all parts of a singular process there, of group interaction, generating new thoughts together.

Shawn

That reminds me of another three man experiment. So you have three men in separate kitchens making themselves one bowl of soup. Just enough to eat. No more, no less, just enough for one bowl. And that's one experiment. We see how long that took, how much energy it took to do that, and what was the outcome. And the other experiment. You have three men in one kitchen. One guy cooks all the soup by himself, and the other two guys read feminist analysis on why, by default, example people in this world are guys. So how long did it take to make the soup for the three of them? How much surplus time for individuals was created through the merging of those tasks?

Aaron

Yeah, the power of friendship there.

Shawn

The power of friendship. You know, it's almost like an economic principle, but it's like under² economics, right? Like the principle that we talk about within economics, the economy of scale, that's the economic framing for something that's actually happening socially in social relations and just the... mathematical efficiency of the power of friendship. It's like a really incredible thing that we take for granted. And through that lens the neoliberal atomization of society, and this like sectioning off of people into individual bubbles, it just seems so sinister.

Aaron

Yeah, It's interrupting a very basic process for how humans can exist in the world in a way that makes sense and is part of our history and part of what works for us. And it

² More primordial than; more fundamental than, etc.

does really point to, I think, why, despite the fact that the power of friendship is a neutral tool and sometimes can be used for bad, it's actually really important to not advocate for its abolishment.

Shawn

Yeah, some people on Twitter go too far with the opposing power of friendship stuff. I just try to remind myself they're like 22.

Aaron

And because I get it, it's a generative and it can even be generative of bad- Like if a group of like, really good friends are fascists working together, they could do really bad things. I get that like Twitter people, I hear you, but I still think we can't abolish the friendship form.

Shawn

Yeah, I want to completely acknowledge there is such a thing as misuse of the power of friendship and I'm concerned with that as well. But, I think to cede the generative power of friendship to the opposition is just a major tactical mistake. So there's the generative power of friendship. There is the sort of social hypnosis power of friendship, which is the distorting field on ideas and ethics that comes with having a fondness for someone, and there is the nourishing power of friendship, the friendship that we all need to survive and thrive as people. And also to have a sufficient, nourishing friendship to protect ourselves from the corrupting potential of the misuse of the social hypnosis power of friendship. Like, the social hypnosis power of friendship is neither good nor bad in itself either. Like, it can be totally fine to be hypnotized by the charisma of someone who happens to have good ideas that are beneficial to you. If you're starved for the nourishing power of friendship, the nourishment of being friends with someone who's socially hypnotic in a bad way is like part of the equation there. So there's sort of a dark side of the nourishment power of friendship, also.

Aaron

Yeah, I tend to think, like, the healthy version of social hypnosis would have to be more like, going back to the idea of just like a more mutual influence.. Where like, people can hopefully influence each other towards the good. It could also be towards the bad, as all

of these things have two sides. But like, even if, they're hypnotizing you to doing a good thing... The word hypnotizing people is kinda...

Shawn

Hypnotizes is a little bit of an extreme word there. Yeah, but I think it's true to say that in at least some circumstances, you know, you have mentor relationships. I guess.

Aaron

Yeah mentorship is a type of hypnosis. You give them advice, and like, ingrain it in their head and they're like, "yeah, this thing, this common bit of wisdom."

Shawn

So I feel like "hypnosis" is maybe throwing us down the wrong path... "Influence" even still sort of feels to have a little bit of a bad taste to it too. But like, it's a reality of the world. I'm not so naive or something that I'm like, oh, no one ever influences-

Aaron

Specifically for friendship. I think good friendships should have mutual influence if it's all unidirectional.

Shawn

Yeah. For like close, nourishing friendship, for sure.

Aaron

So I think that's like that's one way to tell whether because if you're like, doling out nourishment to someone starving of social nourishment and then like using that dependency as a vector for your unidirectional influence, that's a kind of like weird, parasitic social thing. It's not real friendship.

Shawn

Yeah, like if you're completely closed off to being influenced or impressed by them, like.
(laughs)

Aaron

Yeah, imagine like you're some cynical person who's using others for your own ends.

But honestly, like, I know that happens, but I think we might project that more than it, actually happens.

Shawn

Yeah. That's true. It's probably important to not mistake people being well-meaning but self-centered with being amoral vampires.

Aaron

Yeah.

Shawn

Unless you have, like, a lot of evidence intersubjectively verified. That's why you talk about those soulless vampires with friends, come to a consensus to protect yourselves.

Aaron

And if you've been labeled a soulless vampire by one friend group, knock that shit off and find some new friends who won't see that in you because you got better.

Shawn

Just like... addressing the parasitic vampires in the audience. (both laugh)

Aaron

"To all the parasitic vampires..."

Shawn

Yeah, just a quick message to all the parasitic vampires in the audience tonight. You know, we're on to you. And all your friends and us, we want you to clean up your act.

Aaron

Yeah. The generative power of friendship can be used for good or ill. The influence, hypnosis, power of friendship can be used for good or ill. Nourishment seems inherently kind of good, but you can weaponize it in a way that's messed up. Like feeding the hungry is always good. If you're like, "I'm only going to feed you if you do something evil." It doesn't mean feeding people is bad. It means doing *that* is bad.

Shawn

Yeah. I think the food, water, shelter, sort of basic needs category is the right one for the nourishing power of friendship, which is one of the three sub categories of friendship that was identified under the rigorous analysis of the mighty, mighty, SRSLY Wrong microscope... finding objective scientific answers about life's most pressing questions.

Aaron

Yeah, it turns out if you zoom in on things really, really close, you always get the answers.

Shawn

Science is just the pursuit of bigger and bigger microscopes to read smaller and smaller texts about science.

Aaron

(laughs) Every word in a science text, when you zoom in on it, has like a whole nother science text in there.

Shawn

Which is more advanced science. You know, we're printing science texts that we can't yet read, but we hope to one day have the microscope size required to read the tiny, tiny text that explains the next iteration of science. The *only* scientific method that's real is the further procurement of larger microscopes.

Aaron

Some people like to say we get to the bottom of things. I like to say we zoom in the closest to things.

Shawn

That hole digging metaphor is incoherent. We've now shifted to the much wiser and better... "zoom in really small, close" metaphor that we see things the closest. (both laugh)

—

Shawn

Hey there friends, let's step out of our merely friends relationship here and step into a *potential* customer/store-owner relationship.

Aaron

Imagine one of your friends has invited you out to dinner, and now, while you're sort of captive audience at the dinner there they are attempting to sell something to you. That's kind of what this is like.

Shawn

We're going to keep this quick. It's a really friendly pitch. We have now for sale on our website, t-shirts that are reflective of the content of our show, including, but not limited to a t-shirt of our beautiful new logo.³ You're invited if you want to have some cool more shirts in your life to go to that web store and spend \$25 to buy one, full disclosure we're doing this to make money. We're not doing this to be your friend. (laughs)

Aaron

Yeah, it doesn't cost us \$25 to have the shirts made and sent to you. It costs us less than that. The \$25 includes a profit.

Shawn

100% of the profits of this t-shirt web store are going to go to make sure that the SRSLY Wrong podcast has better research, funnier sketches, and more episodes. That's the purpose of the store... just being totally straight and upfront with it. That's what's going down. Come on down hear the little dingling bell of walking into our store and load up your cart with interesting t-shirts that we made.

Aaron

Sorry if that was a bit weird. It had to happen. Yeah. Now back to friendship.

Shawn

And I know there's some people out there that are like, wow, I do want to grab one of these shirts. That sounds like a great way to support the show. And. Also get a cool t-shirt at the end of it. Awesome. There's other people saying, I don't want a shirt like

³ We closed the t-shirt web store and are looking for a better shirt provider in the future.

that. Let's move on. And to those people I say, absolutely. Thank you.

Shawn

So, as political organizers and political agents one of the strongest tools that we have in our arsenal is the power of friendship. Friends listen to what friends say. If you get one person out to an event, you can get them to bring a group of people, their friends, and grow the event. And if you want to bring people on board with your ideology or organization, one of the strongest and easiest steps that you can take towards that is befriending them. Again, friendship is a neutral tool. It's something that can be used for good or evil, and a group that's really successfully, sort of, weaponized the power of friendship, is the alt right. They've intentionally, I think, found people online demographics that are facing loneliness. Young white men who play a lot of video games... A great target demographic, if you're going to use friendship to move people towards political persuasions and they've really, really successfully been able to use online mediums to befriend people and then make their politics more reactionary and vulgar. And then in contrast, you know, there's a little bit of a one sided analysis, but I think there is some truth to this, that often we on the left don't do that. We on the left don't reach out to people who are in need of social connection. The whole sort of like clout chasing culture is very much the exact opposite of reaching out to people who need friends.

Aaron

Yeah. Have you ever heard that ex neo-Nazi public speaker guy Christian Picciolini talk? His life experience really kind of demonstrates this. He didn't have a lot of friends, and the people who became his friends were the people in these neo-Nazi groups. And they really took him in and offered him camaraderie and a place in the world and an understanding of himself in the world. And when he ended up leaving those groups, then his social support systems in a lot of those areas really kind of fell apart. And that stuff is super powerful for people. Or if you look at the Proud Boys, some of those silly hazing ritual things they have, like they punch you until you say enough cereals or whatever, but it's like goofy, like friendshippy stuff. And then at the end, you know, you hug and you're like, oh, we're like, all in this together. And like, you just- it feels like this

group of friends, which is something that everybody needs. And I definitely think that there's a real history of far right groups using that reality to its advantage.

Shawn

There's this dynamic in cults where if you leave the cult, you have no one. And so, like, even if you're within this cult environment and you're facing this abuse and you're facing this cognitive dissonance, and you're having people say things that aren't true and they're being acted as if they're true. And you can see through all this bullshit. And this is part and parcel of any cult, all of these damaging like social interactions and stuff like that. But your choice is to either turn a blind eye to it all and commit to the lifestyle and ideology of the cult, or to turn away and be without support. It's a compromising position to be in. It's one of the reasons why it's so important to have more social connections, and social connections that aren't all part of the same, sort of pod, is because it gives you the freedom to leave if things go sideways. So I guess a question that we should ask ourselves as political organizers is, what can we do to better reach out to people who are isolated, not just as a way to, like, bring them into our ideas and ideology, which is great if your ideas are right, but also to, just help combat loneliness and let people know that they belong in the world. I think that's one of our responsibilities as human beings to one another, is to make sure that people don't get left behind, and one of the risks of leaving people behind is having them fall in with the wrong crowd. Not even just because of that, but just more broadly. I feel like we have a bit of an ethical responsibility to try to combat loneliness, and and not contribute to it, you know, not isolate people, not push people who are already isolated away.

Aaron

Yeah, if you're talking about wanting to build a better society and a better future, I think very few people picture their better society as being filled with lonely, isolated, people who have no friends or insufficient friends for their health and well-being and mental well-being. So I guess, like keeping that in mind, it's sort of a prefigurative step to attempt to minimize social isolation and loneliness wherever you can in the world.

Shawn

Aaron, you liberal fool, don't you see that by pacifying the lonely with friendships under this system, they'll never be pushed to the edge to have the revolutionary moment

where they overthrow loneliness and create a perfectly friendship society? By pacifying them, now, under capitalism, you're strengthening capitalism.

Aaron

No. That's stupid. I'm sorry. That's- that's really dumb.

Shawn

Oh. That's stupid? Is the logic of that stupid in other contexts too?

Aaron

Yeah. It is. But specifically in this context. Like, you're not going to be that great at fighting a revolution if you are sick, or committed suicide, or many of the other potential outcomes of extreme loneliness.

Shawn

Yeah, and also it makes sense in a limited context. If you're fighting for a revolution without adjectives, just like whatever revolution people happen to throw together. But like, revolutions can go bad. Like revolutions don't necessarily end in utopia. So yeah, but, you know, I take it back. I don't think you're a liberal. I think you're-

Aaron

Thank you.

Shawn

I think you're sufficiently leftist.

Aaron

Sufficiently leftist liberal.

Shawn

This has been the SRSly Wrong podcast. Thanks so much for listening, everyone. As always, we appreciate so much and want to thank the people who support us financially on Patreon with a monthly gift of \$6 to keep the show going. A lot of people are crying and weeping that they don't have access to all the bonus episodes. They don't have access to the whole archive. And to that we have great news, which is that by chipping

into the Patreon, you get access to all those things, as well as access to our discord, secret Facebook group, and yeah, the ongoing Revolution series, which is a study and analysis of revolutions that's still ongoing. And your \$6 makes all the difference in the world.

Aaron

Ten out of ten history doctors with a degree in utopiaology agree.

Shawn

Really? ten out of ten. There was not a single dissenting utopiaology doctor.

Aaron

Nope. (both laugh)

Shawn

Usually there's one obstinate doctor, but you're telling me that ten out of ten endorsed chipping into the Patreon in a *medical* sense?

Aaron

Yeah. For like, increasing the health of society, viewing like perfect health as perfect utopia? Society doctors. Yes, they think that our treatment plan needs to be promoted because it's the best.

Shawn

That's incredible.

Aaron

Although one out of ten doctors did say that six bucks was too cheap. And it should be more. A bit of a cantankerous one.

Shawn

But it sounds to me like that obstinate doctor really appreciates independent leftist content. And while we might have come to different conclusions about what the default donation should be on our Patreon, I respect and admire his service to the society

doctor community. Thanks for listening, everyone.

Aaron

Have a great week.

—

Next time on SRSLY Wrong...

Aaron

...Pop out my earphone. That's it? That's the end of the this episode of SRSLY Wrong? They didn't tie up their storyline. I don't know if the villain is redeemed. How things turned out for the hero.

Shawn

That sucks man.

Aaron

Those lazy hoes. I'm going to go ask Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be.

Shawn

Well, high roller! You can afford visiting the oracle that knows all and sees all?

Aaron

It's on my insurance. One visit for all time I can use.

Shawn

Sorry to hear about that tough time that you had. If you need, just like, someone to talk to, I'm always willing to just listen. Or if you want to hear what I think you should do, I'm always willing to give feedback.

Aaron

Awesome.

Shawn

I'm your guy.

Aaron

So thank you. And all those things you just said from you to me also apply for me to you.

Shawn

Oh that's. Cool. I wasn't fishing for that, but that's nice.

Aaron

Jjust hearing you say it made me want to say it wasn't just because I have to.

Shawn

I just want to let you know it's sincere. I wasn't just trying to get you to say that to me. I was actually just sincerely expressing myself.

Aaron

I assumed so.

Shawn

Perfect. But you got somewhere to be. I won't hold you up...

Aaron

Sure. Yeah, yeah, I'm going to head out, so.. I'll just go through the interdimensional door to Mister What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be's dimension. He has one all to himself.

(portal noises)

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Hello welcome to Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be's Lair of All That Is Was and Ever Will Be. Do you have a question for me?

Aaron

Yes, actually I do. The SRSLY Wrong episode, Power of Friendship. They did a two part sketch. They didn't do the end of the sketch. I don't know how the story ends. What happens? I need to know.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Ah, yes. Let me just remember... Ah, yes, I remember that. I remember all things. What happened to the villain of the story and the hero of the story? Great question. Well, the villain of the story became fabulously popular. Tons of Twitter followers, great friends, diverse group of friends, lots of people, intimate relationships, too. He was really able to open up to people. I mean, obviously not the hero of the story, they sort of became estranged after that incident, but he went on to have a really successful marriage, actually started on Bumble.

Aaron

Oh, really? She messaged him then... Assuming it was a heterosexual relationship.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Oh it was, yeah. And she did most certainly message first. And he had a long, quite nice life. He was a very sociable person and he clicked into society in a really real way into these friend groups. And when she passed away, he was able to fall into the arms of his many friends who supported him through that time. About five years after she passed, he moved to an old folks home in scenic Old Wrongtown, which is actually the place the Wrongtown Utopian Movement started, believe it or not. And when he was in scenic Old Wrong Town and the old folks home, one day he was playing mahjong with the girls, drinking gin and lemonade, and he looked across the old folks home, and by happenstance, by some coincidence of history, he saw someone that he recognized. That was... the hero of the story.

Aaron

Oh!

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

And the hero of the story was over in the corner playing solitaire. Of course, the villain of the story then *remembers* how he gave him the brush at the Saint Patrick's Day party,

and he just brought up all these complex emotions for him about, you know, this was the person who gave me my life, who who saved me from the brink of being someone who would commit mass murder. *And he had saved me.* And I gave him the brush at a Saint Patrick's Day party because I was chasing women, and it was actually chasing the woman that would become my wife. But I should have done something... And all these tough questions, he felt. And so he didn't talk to him that day. Finished the mahjong. He said he's going to figure out the right thing to say. And so the hero of the story, he had sort of fallen into a little bit of a masculinity trap over his life, and as he had aged, he became more and more reliant on just this husband. And they had a beautiful life together. But he lost those social connections. He relied more and more on just his husband, who was no doubt just an *incredible* husband. And when his husband passed away, he didn't have that support network and he was devastated by it and he wasn't doing very well. And he died that night in his room in a bed made for two. He passed away. And the next day the villain found out that he had missed the chance to redeem himself, that he could have spoken to him, and maybe even saved his life by being that friend to him, being that connection for him. And he had choked. He was too nervous. He was too worried about his own reputation to step up, do what was right, and he'd missed the shot.

Aaron

Wow. Not only is that a really good story, but Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be. You are a good storyteller.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Well thank you.

Aaron

That was beautiful. And, you know, I thought he was going to end up blowing up Manhattan a little bit disappointed he didn't, but.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

No, he didn't at all.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Yeah, actually, Manhattan stands to this day as you know.

Aaron

Oh yeah. Right, right. Yeah.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

There is a silver lining, which is that the villain of the story, having seen what happened and because of his guilt, he founded a non-profit, an organization which works to fight against loneliness. And the little silver lining of the story is that he actually ended loneliness in his lifetime. And loneliness now no longer exists.

Aaron

Oh, that's why there's no more loneliness.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Yeah, that was him, the villain of the story.

Aaron

Oh, I'm going to tell my friend network all about that when I go back to my dimension. My various friend networks, obviously.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Yeah. You don't want to put all your eggs in one friend network.

Aaron

All right. Great. Well, I have a million more questions, but my insurance policy only gives me one for all eternity. So I'm going to open a door back to my universe, and say goodbye.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Ah, That's too bad. I love answering questions. I'd love to answer more for you. It's really fun, but.

Aaron

I understand. You're just one person. Time is limited.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Yeah, I mean, I feel bad about it sometimes, but I just try to remind myself, like, don't have to be a hero to everyone and answer all their questions.

Aaron

Yeah. Just because you know everything doesn't mean you can do everything.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Thank you. That means so much to me to hear. Thanks. Know what? Just one quick question. Anything.

Aaron

Does anybody ever blow up Manhattan? I know you know all that will be... so.

(somber music)

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

(sighs) Yes, yes they do.

Aaron

Is like a bad thing. Or is it kind of like they're blowing up a city to rebuild it, make it more ecological or something?

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

It's a bad thing.

Aaron

Oh, damn.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

There's a whole lot that goes into that. But yeah, it's a bad one. Like it's bad. It's like really, really bad.

Speaker6

Shit. When?

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

I'm sorry. That's- You didn't ask that.

Aaron

Oh yeah, that wasn't my question. Huh? Wonder if I'll see it. It's not a question. I'm just wondering.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Oh, yeah. Feel free to wonder. Yeah, you won't, but your kids will. And one of them will be there even though you warn them. Sorry. Couldn't resist telling you that. I don't know. Don't know what's wrong with me.

Aaron

Uh..

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

It's a burden. It's hard remembering everything. Sometimes you just blurt stuff out like that.

Aaron

Yeah, I can only imagine. Sorry. I'd try to empathize with you more. I'm just envisioning my yet-to-be-born child's death at the hands of their not listening to my advice.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

If it helps you think about it, you'll name her Casey. But now that I've said that to you, you'll name her probably Danielle or Stephanie. But you forget the details of this conversation. You always sort of wonder if I got it right. I always find it really weird when I remember that me telling you things changes the timeline, and I have to express that, obviously.

Aaron

Yeah, this conversation is annoying now.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Imagine being me!

Aaron

Yeah. No, I feel, I feel like this is some social weirdness- like you- I don't know why you. I'm going to open my dimension door. Go back. Goodbye. See ya.

Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be

Oh, God damn it, Mr. What-Is-Was-And-Ever-Will-Be. Why do you always do that? I can remember anything that ever has happened, will happen, or is currently happening, but can't remember that people don't like hearing about the deaths of their children. Fuck. Oh well. Well, at least remember that I have a happy ending in *my* end. That's a silver lining for me.

See you in about ten days, everybody.

~End~

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