Female friendships provide Generation X and Boomer women with a powerful support network through relationships that run very deep, especially among Gen Xers. These women discuss intimate thoughts and feelings and maintain close contact, regardless of physical distance. They help one another through major life issues by providing comfort and encouragement. Female friendships are a cornerstone of sisterhood on which women depend.

Nearly all adults (90%) believe that friendships are an essential part of living a happy and healthy life. While friendship can exist on many levels, adults claim an average of four close friends. This is consistent across generation and across gender.

Women, and especially Gen X women, share their deepest thoughts and feelings with their girlfriends.

Topics of conversation between friends differs by gender. Women most often discuss relationships, whereas men tend to keep it lighter by talking about sports, hobbies, and politics.
In addition, female friends are more likely than male friends to talk about health and their dreams for the future. Among girlfriends, Boomers tend to talk more than Gen Xers about the past, travel, health, and religion, while Gen Xers are more likely to discuss work.

Gen X women lead the way when it comes to sharing with friends. Compared to Boomer women, they are more likely to hide nothing from close friends (49% vs. 39%) and to say that no topic is off limits (55% vs. 40%). This pattern holds true for married women as well: about half (51%) of female Boomers who are married say they share more with their significant other than with girlfriends, compared with just 38% of married Gen Xer women.

**Women don’t let distance affect their close friendships.**

Gen X women are in frequent contact with their close female friends even when not spending time together in-person (31% are in communication with their friends at least once a day vs. 20% of Boomer women, 20% of Gen X men, and 8% of Boomer men). Interestingly, though, Gen X women are more likely to say that they long for deeper, more meaningful connections with their friends (46% vs. 35% for Boomer women). Perhaps they feel this way because 25% of them communicate with close friends primarily via text messaging.
Among the roughly one-third of Boomer women that long for a deeper connection with friends, many say that distance is a problem (39%). In fact, distance may be why Boomer women most commonly communicate with close girlfriends by phone (41% vs. 29% of Boomer men).

Given their reliance on phones and texting, it is not surprising that roughly half of Gen X and Boomer women say that technology has positively affected their close friendships (53% vs. 48%).

Friendships among women serve as support systems more so than friendships among men.

While both men and women look at their same-sex friends as giving them someone to experience life with or to talk to, Boomer women are more likely than men to lean on these friends for comfort. For instance, 33% of female Boomers turn to close friends to help them cope with life compared with 22% of male Boomers. Among Boomers, women are also more likely than men to report having a best friend (67% vs. 57%), which may explain the difference.

When it comes to how they usually spend their time together, female friends tend to have deeper interactions than male friends. Women leverage their friendships as a support system, talking through major life issues and encouraging one another, while men look to their close buddies for relaxation, by joking around or talking about current events.
Implications

Social relationships are widely viewed as integral to health, in both the short and long-term, and female friendships, especially among Generation X, are immensely important. Fostering friendships among women and helping men to achieve the same level of depth in their relationships with each other can have a positive impact on adults’ well-being.

In addition, female friendships hold the potential to help women navigate life transitions. The supportive role female friends play in each other’s lives positions them well to help each other through difficulties and changes as well as to celebrate successes.


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