



The power of female friendships

Women are powerhouses of emotions, and things can get very intense very easily. It may be for this very reason that for the past few decades or more, the media has pitted woman against woman, associating dark emotions like competitiveness and jealousy (think catty celeb gossip) with inherently uplifting female friendships. Even folklore has been known to use the myth of “woman against woman” (think Cinderella against her stepsisters or Snow White against her evil stepmother) for its own patriarchal agenda.



Truth be told, humans are social animals, and all social animals need a pack — to work with, to bond with, and to lift each other up.

Roxane Gay, author of *Bad feminist*, once said that it is time to let go of the idea that all female friendships must be toxic or competitive.

“This myth is like heels and purses — pretty but designed to slow women down,” she stated.

In stark contrast to media’s harsh portrayal of platonic female friendships, women today recognise the sheer power of togetherness and the benefits of having power packs that help them overcome obstacles together. They value their female friends, not simply to rebel against the exaggerated claims of hyper competitiveness that hinder true friendship, but also because they realise that sticking together and boosting each other up is the only way for this gender to reach the heights they desire.

While organic and innocent, there is a very definite and precise science behind powerful female friendships. A UCLA study shows that during stressful situations, where men most often feel a “fight or flight” response, women tend to release oxytocin, which is a hormonal surge to “tend and befriend” others. It is this innate difference in the wiring of the female brain that has them turning to friends of the same gender whenever they



are going through something major in their lives.

Women ‘understand.’ The term has been used specifically for female friendships because in situations of emotional turmoil where a male friend is quick to offer (good-natured) advice or support, a

female friend empathises. Women make other women feel heard, nurtured and validated just by being a non-judgemental safety net for them.

Female bonding is all the more rewarding because it allows for certain freedoms that a woman may not be able to hold outside of her close circle. As mostly all women go through the same physical and emotional changes in life, healthy female friendships make women feel safer, calmer and less restricted.

Very seldom do healthy relationships let emotional intensity get the better of their friendship. Mostly, if not always,



female friendships are the true great loves of our lives. Assuming often interchangeable mother-daughter roles, they channel the intensity of their emotions into caregiving and boosting rather than belittling and pulling down. Female friendships are crucial for our emotional wellbeing and from a young age, are known to provide a sense of emotional connection, purpose and belonging.

Gloria Steinem once so eloquently said, “Women understand. We may share experiences, make jokes, paint pictures, and describe humiliations that mean nothing to men, but women *understand*.”

By Munira Fidai
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