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THE LINES THAT LINK US

MAGAZINE





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— A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR —

*C*onnection sits at the centre of our lives. It is how we make sense of who we are, how we are seen, and where we belong. The people around us reflect something back, grounding us, shaping us, and reminding us that we are not moving through the world alone.

But for something so instinctive, connection is also fragile. Relationships shift as we do. Some fade slowly, others end suddenly. New ones arrive when we least expect them. They evolve alongside us through distance, through change, through the different seasons of life.

What keeps them alive is not chance but intention. Maintaining the closeness we already have. Making room for new people, and learning how to show up when it is easier to drift apart. Connection is natural, but it takes work, occasionally the light, everyday kind, sometimes the harder and more uncomfortable kind.

In this issue, *The Lines That Link Us*, we explore how those ties form and endure. How we define them, what they mean to us, and how they shape the way we live. We spoke to people about the connections that matter most in their lives, and their words and reflections are woven throughout these pages.

Our hope is that these stories spark something in you: a reminder of the ties you treasure, an insight into the ones you have lost, and perhaps a new way of thinking about the connections still waiting to be made.

Happy reading.

RAMONA ANECHITE



WHAT CONNECTION MEANS TO US...

“CONNECTION MEANS MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING, EMPATHY, AND RESPECT. IT’S ABOUT FEELING SEEN AND ALLOWING OTHERS TO FEEL THE SAME.”

“FOR ME, CONNECTION MEANS SHOWING UP CONSISTENTLY AND CHOOSING TO HAVE EACH OTHER’S BACKS.”



“IT’S A BOND WHERE WE SHARE EXPERIENCES AND GENUINELY CARE ABOUT EACH OTHER’S LIVES.”

“IT’S NOT ABOUT CONSTANT CONTACT — IT’S ABOUT MUTUAL PRESENCE, EVEN IF BRIEF.”

Connection is rarely symmetrical. At times we give more than we receive, and at others, we’re carried by the people around us. What matters most is not perfection, but the ongoing choice to show up.

In a culture that often celebrates independence, it can feel strange to admit how much we need one another. Yet our most enduring bonds remind us that dependence and support are not weakness but proof of trust. Connection is the

reassurance that we are seen, known, and cared for, even in the smallest ways.



THE ART OF CONNECTION

WORDS BY RAMONA ANECHITE

You may not think of connection as an art form; connecting with others is a part of life, second nature. Forming intentional and genuine bonds with others, however, takes more effort and balance.

When we connect with others, how often do we stop to think about how we're doing it? We recycle the usual "Hi, how are you?" "Good, you?", swap a few life updates, then it's done. Catch-up complete. But do we leave feeling any more connected, or just overloaded with information?

If we pay attention to how we go about connecting, presence tends to be a top priority. Checking in constantly, making sure we're around. And naturally, presence is essential, but presence alone does not guarantee closeness. We can't just be physically present and assume that's a job done. You can be in someone's life daily and still feel distant.

Connection isn't just about availability, it's about understanding. To feel close to someone, we have to understand them, and feel understood ourselves. As any relationship guru will tell you, communication is key. But communication without comprehension is just empty words and a waste of breath. This is where a lot of relationships, regardless of the nature (friendships, romantic relationships, family), break down. There's a lot of communication, but not a lot of comprehension.

Comprehension takes a lot more effort. It means opening yourself up to the possibility of being wrong. Having a willingness to shift perspectives. It requires humility and a suspension of ego. It displays mutual respect and understanding: the basis of any true connection.

Intentionality is then what makes the difference between surface interaction and real connection. It's being deliberate with your words, your presence, your energy. It's choosing to pay attention. Choosing

to remember the thing they told you six months ago. Choosing to follow up not out of obligation, but care. It's the friend who texts, "Thinking of you. How did your meeting go?" It's the person who notices the shift in your voice, or calls you out when you're deflecting with a joke.

If we think about how we want to feel in our friendships, relationships, and so on — we want to feel valued. We want to feel understood, prioritised, cared for. We want to know that we matter to the people around us. And although actions like remembering meetings may feel small, it signals that we have a meaningful place in others' lives.

To truly connect, we must be willing to show up with consideration, comprehension and care. That means going beyond transactional updates and fleeting check-ins. It means treating the people in our lives as more than characters in our own storyline, but as whole, dynamic people we're lucky to walk alongside.

Connection is less about performance and more about presence of mind. It is, at its heart, an art. And like any art form, it takes intention to keep it alive.

"I REALLY VALUE COMPREHENSION OVER JUST COMMUNICATION. IT'S NOT JUST WHAT'S SAID, BUT HOW IT'S RECEIVED AND UNDERSTOOD."



AUTHENTICITY AS A MIRROR

WORDS BY RAMONA ANECHITE

A lot of us find making genuine connections with others difficult. There are so many external factors to think about – you never want to cross people's boundaries, and it's hard to know if you're coming off too strong or too disinterested. It's a game you seem to have lost the rulebook for.

How much can you open up? What's socially acceptable to say? There's a deep-rooted fear in performing and saying the 'right' things and acting in the 'correct' way that we overcomplicate simple interactions and dwell on words never said for days. We then prioritise performance over authenticity as that feels safe and within the edges that we know and take comfort in.

One person we spoke to put it simply: "People are performing rather than connecting." And it shows. There's a need to downplay our struggles and amplify the wins in the hope that people may not see us for

who we really are – maybe because we ourselves haven't accepted it either. It feels risky to be vulnerable, so we move on with our best foot forward, hoping no one can see the tiny cracks in the otherwise fine china.

We carry a secret fear of being misunderstood or rejected, and in that case, we feel it's better to not open up at all than take that risk. More often than not, we end up prioritising pleasing other people and tip toeing around anxieties and emotions rather than being genuine. "There's so much judgement happening now," one interviewee said. "Sometimes it's easier to play it safe and talk about the weather."

But our tendency to hide who we are either because we're scared to be rejected by others, or because secretly we also reject those parts of ourselves, is just pushing us further and further away from the people in our lives.

It makes it easier for things to fall apart

"I THINK SOMETIMES A LOT CAN GET LOST IN TRANSLATION AND MISUNDERSTANDING THAT CAN MAKE PEOPLE FEEL DISCONNECTED. POOR COMMUNICATION CAN MAKE THIS WORSE."

when life gets in the way. Work deadlines, personal stress. "Everyone has busy lives," someone else shared. "People may not understand what you're going through, and that can lead to disconnection."

The fear of being misunderstood stops us from giving people chances to show up for us when we may need them – and can instead cause us to harbour secret resentment, expecting others to know what we may want or need but being too scared to communicate these expectations in case it causes turbulence. What are we left with then?

It of course depends on the type of connection we're looking for – some people avoid forming deeper relations with others and stick to surface level friendships and relationships.

But really this unwillingness to go deeper is our own internal struggle of seeing ourselves clearly, and letting others see us in the same way.

So, instead we perform and pretend out of convenience, pushing our own emotional needs away to avoid difficult conversations or personal growth.

We have to learn to be okay with being open and vulnerable and accept the possibility of losing some people from this, rather than performing to be liked and accepted.

It's more important to be true to ourselves and allow the people who want to be in our lives to be there, letting the people who don't, to go.

DEPTH OVER PERFORMANCE

WORDS BY ELLIE BASIR



To me, connection involves mutual understanding, empathy, and respect. It's not just about always talking or spending time together, it's about feeling seen and understood by another person, and allowing for them to feel the same with you.

You can hold different levels of connection with different people, some surface level and some deeper, but there's always that understanding and respect.

It shows up in my life mostly with my friends and family, those I can laugh with, and trust completely. We don't always have to talk every day, but there's a depth and mutual care that's always present. It also shows up through colleagues and work, but again there's that shared understanding and experience of the difficulties we go through every day that makes us bond and connect.

Loyalty, humour, and light-heartedness are important, but also depth. I care a lot about people being emotionally intelligent and having empathy. I really value comprehension over just communication. It's not just what's said, but how it's received and understood.

I feel like intention is missing in connections nowadays. So many interactions today feel surface-level or transactional. There's nothing wrong with casual connections, but it feels like there's less space for building meaningful, long-term relationships. A lot of people are performing rather than connecting which makes everything feel less sincere. Also, comprehension which I mentioned before. Everyone raves about communication in relationships or friendships but what's the point of communicating if the other person doesn't receive it or want to understand it. The want to understand is missing in a lot of connections, people want to take or see things how it will benefit them.

Honestly, maintaining my connections is something I'm working on. I think about the people I care about a lot, but I

don't always check in as much as I'd like to. When I do, it's usually through messages or memes, little things that say that I'm thinking of them. I'm learning to be more intentional about showing up.

When meeting new people, vibe is everything. I naturally gravitate toward people who are empathetic, funny, down to earth, and who don't take themselves too seriously. If there's laughter, understanding, and shared values, that's usually when I feel there can be a connection.

I think now people meet mostly online or events/work which makes sense. It's convenient and easy. However, it does also contribute to that surface-level feeling, because there's not always the space or safety for deeper interactions. Everything is fast-paced, and everyone is quick to move on.

I find my biggest challenge when meeting new people is small talk. I find it hard to engage in conversations that feel forced or inauthentic. I can get to holding the deeper conversations easily, but that initial chit-chat stage can be frustrating for me. I don't enjoy anything that feels fake.

When it comes to the friendships I have, I try not to place heavy expectations on people. I like my space, and I give others theirs too. But I do have clear boundaries, I won't tolerate disrespect or fakeness. Beyond that, I just appreciate people who are real, kind, loyal and understanding.

Personally, I really try to lead with empathy and honesty. I don't pretend to be something I'm not, and I try to give people the freedom to be themselves too. I'm extremely loyal, I'm always listening, and I value depth over performance. And even though I sometimes need space or ghost, I am always thinking and deeply caring for the people close to me. I will show up where I'm needed.

I would always tell people to make the effort to reach out even if it feels awkward

or vulnerable. This is something I'm working on. And also, learn to enjoy your own company. Do things that make you happy alone, and then say yes to opportunities where you can meet people naturally. You will place less expectations on connections with other people when you are content with yourself and being alone.

"PERSONALLY, I REALLY TRY TO LEAD WITH EMPATHY AND HONESTY. I DON'T PRETEND TO BE SOMETHING I'M NOT, AND I TRY TO GIVE PEOPLE THE FREEDOM TO BE THEMSELVES TOO."



WAYS WE STAY CLOSE IN BUSY LIVES

KEEP CHECK-INS CASUAL

Not every message needs to be deep. A 'Thinking of you, how are you?' text can mean more than you realise. Low-pressure check-ins are a small way to show you're there, even if you're not physically around.

"SOMETIMES I'LL JUST SEND A MESSAGE OUT OF THE BLUE TO LET THEM KNOW I'M THINKING OF THEM. THAT CAN BE ENOUGH."

There's a certain guilt that hangs around when you know you've not been prioritising your relationships, but when things get busy, staying in touch with others can feel like just another task to tick off.

But connection doesn't always need grand gestures or hours-long conversations. Sometimes, it's the small, everyday things that help us feel seen and stay close.

In the end, it's the tiny habits that hold the most weight. Showing up in even small ways lets people know you care and helps keep connections alive.

Here are some ways we're keeping our connections alive, even when time is short:

LET CONNECTION LOOK DIFFERENT

Some friends you talk to every day. Some you only see a few times a year. Both are just as real as the other. As long as the care is there, the shape of the connection can flex.

KEEPING UP ON SOCIALS

In this digital day and age, we have the ability to communicate without really communicating. For some reason, sending a 'how are you?' message feels like too much, but you can always send a funny reel about how your life is falling apart to keep people updated. Short and succinct.

"I DON'T ALWAYS CHECK IN AS MUCH AS I'D LIKE, BUT SENDING A REEL IS MY WAY OF SHOWING I CARE."

PUT DATES IN THE DIARY

Sometimes, the trickiest part is the actual planning, so we put it off. Getting things sorted and written down, not matter how distant the date, can make a difference — as well as giving you something to look forward to.

"WE MESSAGE TO CHECK IN, BUT MAKING PLANS TO MEET IN PERSON HELPS US STAY CLOSE."

SHARE WHAT YOU LOVE

Whether it's a playlist, a podcast, a weird niche interest or a random obsession, sharing your passions creates connection. It gives people insight into who you are and invites them to meet you in your world.

"PURSUING WHAT YOU LOVE MAKES IT EASIER TO MEET PEOPLE WHO GET YOU AND BUILD SOMETHING REAL FROM THERE."

“THE BEST WAY I’VE FOUND TO MAINTAIN THESE IS THROUGH OPEN CONVERSATION FROM BOTH SIDES. A SIMPLE PHONE CALL TO CHECK IN WITH LONG-DISTANCE FRIENDS OR FAMILY IS OFTEN ENOUGH BECAUSE WE’VE ALREADY BUILT A SHARED UNDERSTANDING THAT MEETING IN PERSON ISN’T ALWAYS POSSIBLE. WE DON’T FEEL THE NEED TO TEXT EVERY DAY, THAT’S OKAY.”



“I LIKE TO MESSAGE MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY WHO I DON’T SEE VERY MUCH JUST TO CHECK IN AND SEE HOW EVERYONE IS, AND MAKE SURE WE HAVE DATES IN THE DIARY TO HAVE FACE TO FACE CATCH UPS.”



THE AWKWARD GAME OF ADULT FRIENDSHIPS

WORDS BY RAMONA ANECHITE

Growing up, I always thought the only times I'd have to make friends were during my school years. I didn't realise this was something I was going to face countless times in my life. I have a habit of taking things I see in movies and tv shows as gospel truth, and having seen characters always have a group of best friends they made in nursery and stuck with for life — I just assumed that would happen to me.

I did always find it easy to make friends, that is, I never found myself lacking if I needed someone to turn to. However, I noticed (and felt) the awkward side of the process very early on. But up until early adult life, we're thrown in environments where opportunities to connect with others are in abundance. One of my good university friends I made just by sitting next to them in a lecture. Another one I made by accident, because we were the only two people in the room that we vaguely recognised — although I actually mistook her for someone else. It did take a couple of weeks for me to register that she was not the person I assumed she was, but it all worked out for the best.

When you finally finish your education years, everyone spreads out. And in a way, you're left to fend for yourself. I still remember the transition from being in a busy university halls where there was a new event every night, to sitting in my bedroom at home, wondering what I was going to do with my Tuesday evening.

Either way, as you move through life, friendships fall apart, people's schedules intervene, and where you were once surrounded by others, you're met with silence.

You think to yourself: hmm.... probably time to go out and meet new people. The only question left is: How?

It can be hard to break through to new friendships and environments. As one person put it, "It feels like people already have their friends and are happy with them." And this is true, by your mid-twenties, social circles are more established, people are busier, and spontaneous bonding is harder to come by.

You can't walk up to someone and say "Do you want to be best friends" without sounding like you've time-travelled from year 7. Although I have tried that a few times. 50 / 50 success rate.

The dreaded small talk minefield is also discouraging. The overall sentiment from the people we spoke to was "I struggle with conversation that feels forced and fake." But still, it always does.

You start questioning everything. Is it weird to follow up after a nice chat? Am I being too intense? Not intense enough? Do I wait for them to message? Suddenly, it feels like dating, and you're wondering why you're sat there overthinking everything.

The good news is, so many people are in the same boat. I can't even tell you how many of my friends are dealing with this right now. People are moving out, having to find new housemates, re-find themselves after heavy breakups — no one is as settled as we think they are, and I think people are mostly welcome to have new connections in their lives.

Depending on where you live, there are multitudes of events and clubs all fo-

cused on making new connections and friendships. Socials, sports-based clubs, book clubs, writing events. I've even heard great success stories from apps like bumble with friends, particularly from people who have moved away.

We just have to be willing to make the effort and take the leap. Who knows what will happen...

"SOMETIMES I THINK YOU HAVE TO PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE AND REACH OUT TO PEOPLE MORE INITIALLY TO SHOW THAT YOU ARE REALLY INTERESTED, AND THIS CAN ENCOURAGE OTHER PEOPLE TO MEET YOU IN THE MIDDLE AND CAN CREATE THAT MUTUAL BOND."

MUTUAL RESPECT, MUTUAL PRESENCE

WORDS BY JODIE CHARMAN

Connection, to me, means having mutual understanding; either similar experiences, passions or interests. Equally, it can come from people who have similar personalities to myself. It's not always about constant communication, but about a shared respect and being seen and understood for who you are.

Connection shows up in my life through the people I interact with most, family, friends, housemates and colleagues. Sometimes, it also appears in more unexpected places, like through strangers online or in public spaces I visit. Each interaction carries a different level of depth, but connection is present when there's mutual presence, even if brief.

The most important things to me in relationships and friendships are mutual respect, understanding, and clear communication. I don't fuss about how often I see or speak to my friends, as long as my social needs are met, I trust that the people I'm close to will be there when and if I need them. Equally, I'll show up for them in the same way.

I know there's a level of trust where I don't feel judged if I make mistakes. My close relationships have my best interests at heart, and I have theirs. I want to see them happy and thriving. Honesty is a key part of maintaining that trust, and from that, love and care can grow, whether romantic or platonic.

Sometimes, communication is what's missing in connection. As humans, we don't

always remain consistent, yet we fall into habits and routines. It can be easy to overlook signs that something requires a change in behaviour or approach.

We tend to assume others will react to things the same way we would, but that's often not the case. We forget that people can't read minds and that communication is a constant effort, not a one-time act.

Maintaining my connections is like juggling, except I'm juggling different-shaped objects that don't throw or land in the same way. Some connections require very little attention, like those I have with work colleagues or family, while others, such as close friends or romantic partners, need more focus and time.

The best way I've found to maintain these is through open conversation from both sides. A simple phone call to check in with long-distance friends or family is often enough because we've already built a shared understanding that meeting in person isn't always possible.

We don't feel the need to text every day, that's okay. In contrast, with my housemates, I speak to them every day. We ask about each other's plans, thoughts, and feelings. There's an understanding there too. When consistency slips, there's no judgment. I often use social media, especially Instagram, to show people they're on my mind, through sending them reels that remind me of them.

When making new connections recently, I've been trying to open myself up

more. I'm making a bigger effort to create foundations for long-term relationships, but I'm also more careful about where I put my time and energy.

I'm working on putting myself first and only investing in things that are good for me. I've learned to set boundaries, so I don't sacrifice my own needs due to things like FOMO. New connections require more effort because they're unfamiliar. There's a lot of learning to be done, and that learning has to go both ways.

At 25, I've found people tend to meet others either by chance or through existing routines, like gyms, clubs, mutual friends, or work.

Alcohol-influenced environments often make people braver when it comes to starting conversations, but we often fear being misunderstood or judged. That's why social media feels safer for many, you can slide into someone's DMs instead of risking real-time rejection.

There's also a big difference between meeting people at university, where everyone is actively looking for friends, and adulthood, where most people already have their circles.

When you start a new job or move to a new place, it can feel like there's no road-map. People are scared to put themselves out there.

The biggest challenge I face when meeting new people is finding the time and mental/social energy to go to new places and strike up conversations with strangers.



My advice to those struggling with connection is:

- Understand that it's tough. No two people function the same.
- Try your best to share feelings with optimistic communication.
- Don't hold back positives, always tell those you love how much you value them.
- For new connections, pursue what you love independently and keep yourself open to conversations and ideas.
- Find courage, connections are invaluable. Even if it feels difficult or awkward at first, it's worth it.
- Know your worth. If a connection feels one-sided or you're not being heard, it's okay to step back.
- Set boundaries. Don't drop everything at the first sign of conflict but do reflect and make considered choices.

EXPECTATIONS WE DON'T ADMIT

We freely voice our standards for our romantic partners, what we expect, what we won't settle for, but when it comes to friendships, it's rarely spoken.

Some expectations we declare easily. "Text me when you get home." "Let's do dinner next week." But others stay quiet. Do we expect our friends to know what we want from them? Or are we just scared to start that conversation? Whatever the reason, we've asked a few people what their friendship expectations are, so maybe you won't have to.

I WANT EFFORT TO BE MUTUAL

"I LIKE MUTUAL EFFORT WITH MAKING PLANS, AND CHECKING IN TO SEE HOW EACH OTHER ARE DOING."

Always being the one to pick up the phone and make the plans is draining, and leaves you wondering if you're a priority in other people's lives. So, rather than constantly waiting for that one person to organise everything, why not take the initiative.

I NEED TO FEEL EMOTIONALLY SAFE

"I HAVE CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WHERE I DON'T FEEL JUDGED IF I MAKE MISTAKES. THERE'S TRUST, AND WE WANT TO SEE EACH OTHER THRIVE."

It's important to know that the people we value have our backs. We're all learning together, and where we'd expect understanding and compassion, we must return that as well.

I WANT YOU TO BE REAL WITH ME

"I WON'T TOLERATE DISRESPECT OR FAKE-NESS. I JUST APPRECIATE PEOPLE WHO ARE REAL, KIND, AND UNDERSTANDING."

We wear so many masks in life. What's the point in having close friendships if we can't be ourselves? Relationships based on ingenuity are not likely to blossom.

I WANT THE FREEDOM TO NOT ALWAYS BE "ON"

"SOME FRIENDSHIPS SHIFT — 60/40, 10/90. THAT'S OKAY, AS LONG AS THERE'S AWARENESS AND CARE."

We're all at different milestones in life. Constant presence isn't always attainable, or useful. Allow space and understanding in quieter seasons, and trust that the bond is still there.

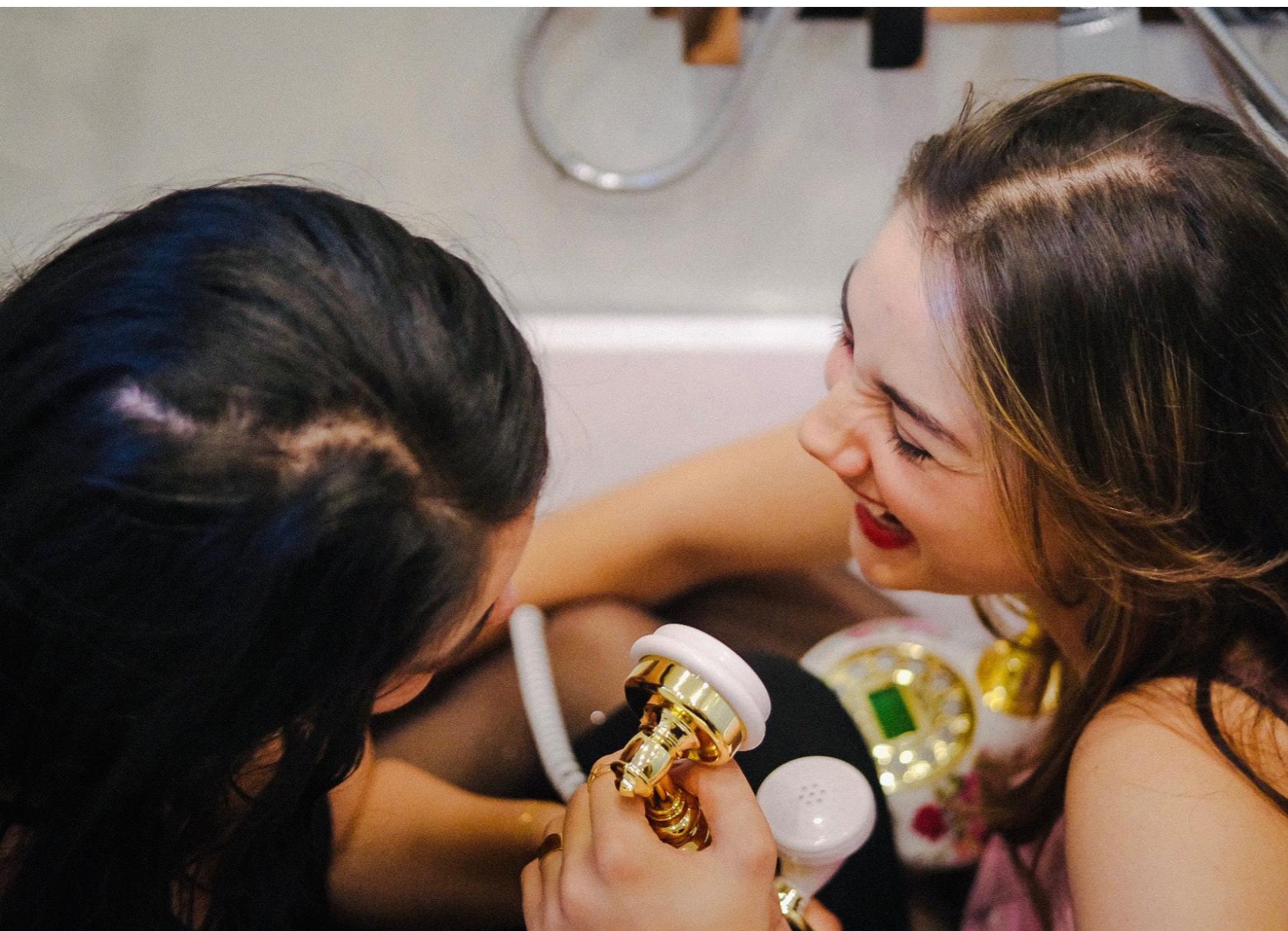
I EXPECT HONESTY — EVEN WHEN IT'S UNCOMFORTABLE

"I DEPEND ON MY CLOSE ONES TO TELL ME WHEN I'M WRONG OR WHAT I CAN DO BETTER, BECAUSE THEY HAVE MY BEST INTERESTS AT HEART."

The people closest to us are the ones best placed to help us grow, if we trust them enough to let them. Hearing the honest truth isn't always easy, but sometimes needed. There is a difference between being honest, and being unnecessarily harsh, however.

We don't always say these things, but maybe we should. Because when we name our needs, we give our friendships room to meet them. We make connection less about guessing, and more about choosing.

And in a world where so much feels unspoken, that honesty can be the very thing that holds us together.



SHOWING UP CONSISTENTLY

AN INTERVIEW WITH SAKINA

What does connection mean to you personally?

S: Taking the effort to make time and show up consistently — you don't have to agree on everything, but you make a choice to stick together and have each other's backs.

How does it show up in your life?

S: Family and friends — being able to pick up the phone and have someone answer, getting a message out of the blue, having someone drop something just to talk to you.

What is important to you when it comes to your relationships / friendships?

S: Mutual respect, trust and honesty, especially honesty. I depend on my close ones to tell me when I'm wrong or what I can do better, because they know me best and have my best interests at heart.

What do you think is missing a lot of the time in connections? Why?

S: Constructive criticism. I think a lot of connections nowadays (especially social ones) are maintained under the unspoken understanding of constant, unwavering support — your 'ride or die'. But this can lead to a behaviour of enabling, rather than helping someone grow. We're so quick to cancel celebrities for someone they said 10 years ago but won't respectfully call out our nearest and dearest for something we know isn't right. It's in our best interests to help our friends and family develop into what we know can be their best selves, rather than helping them stay in vicious circles of self-sabotage or enable them to repeat patterns we know will hinder them in the long term.

What is the best way you've found for maintaining your connections?

S: Meeting in person — nothing will ever replace that. Spending time with them, sharing memories and trading stories, laughing until it hurts — all of it solidifies your bond.

What about when making new connections?

S: Being open to getting to know a

person and never being quick to label them or put them into a box based on your first impression of them. Don't assume there are things they are/aren't interested in just based off a few comments, don't assume their political positionality based on a T shirt or a badge. People are complex and beautiful and figuring each new person out is a wonderful process — you need to ride the wave, not try and write a roadmap.

How do you think people usually connect / meet nowadays?

S: Probably social media, digital accessibility is seriously peaking and people have a chance to be their more authentic selves behind a screen than they do in person (they also have the chance to paint the best version of themselves and their lives on social media — i.e. 'look at me living my best life,' so they're able to put their best foot forward when making a new connection)

What is the biggest challenge you have in meeting new people?

S: Tiptoeing around socially acceptable conversations — there's so much judgement, cancelling and political correctness happening, and the boundaries for what's permissible to speak about are shifting and evolving everyday — sometimes it's easier to play it safe and stick to talking about the weather, but the issue with that is you end up knowing more about the precipitation levels next Wednesday than you do about the person you've just met

What expectations do you think you have for your friendships?

S: To wish the best for each other and root for each other even when you might not be rooting for yourself

How do you embody these values yourself?

S: Celebrating all the wins — big or small, and reminding each other of everything we've achieved

What advice would you give people who are struggling with maintaining or making connections?

S: If you're struggling to maintain a

connection and it's eating away at your peace, chances are it's not a connection you need to maintain, connection goes both ways, and you can't force it. All you can do is be true to yourself but also open to growing and learning something new from the other person.

THE TIES WITHIN

WORDS BY RAMONA ANECHITE



Self-love is praised and spoken about a lot, but not always practiced effectively. It's usually taken as self-care, affirmations and so on, but the real self-love comes from a deep knowing of yourself. Knowing how you respond to things, knowing your needs, your limits. And maybe most importantly, knowing how to hold your own company without restlessness or fear.

That kind of connection with ourselves is often overlooked. We chase connection outwardly, in friendships, relationships, conversations that make us feel less alone. And those things matter. But what we don't always realise is how much the depth of those connections is shaped by the one we hold with ourselves.

When we're not grounded internally, we tend to reach. We over-give, over-ask, over-attach. We wait for others to validate what we haven't yet accepted in ourselves. We place pressure on our connections, not intentionally, but from a belief that they should complete or stabilise us.

But when we're rooted in who we are, our outlook is different. As one interviewee said, "You will place less expectations on connections with other people when you are content with yourself and being alone." That self-contentment doesn't mean you don't want closeness, it just means you don't need it to feel whole.

In fact, it often makes you better at connection. Because when you know your worth, you stop forcing things that don't serve you. You stop shrinking or overextending just to be liked. You're able to give freely, listen more openly, and connect from a place of generosity rather than hunger.

One person described their shift this way: "I'm working on putting myself first and only investing in things that are good for me... I've learned to set boundaries, so I don't sacrifice my own needs." As when

you consistently put yourself last, you then begin to believe you're not worthy of all the things you give to other people. And if you don't believe you're worth it, how can you expect other people to?

Self-connection teaches us how to navigate the emotional commotion of the world. It reminds us that not every silence is rejection, and not every change in rhythm is a loss. It helps us differentiate between loneliness and solitude, between validation and true understanding.

And it doesn't mean the work is done. Being grounded in yourself doesn't mean you won't ever feel hurt or disappointed or lost. It just means you are able to manage these things better, and understand that you will be okay, because you're settled within yourself. A baseline of safety that no one else is responsible for building.

From that place, connection becomes less about filling gaps and more about sharing space. You're able to choose your connections and the people you want in your life based on what will add value and fulfil you, and that is where some of the deepest, most freeing relationships begin.

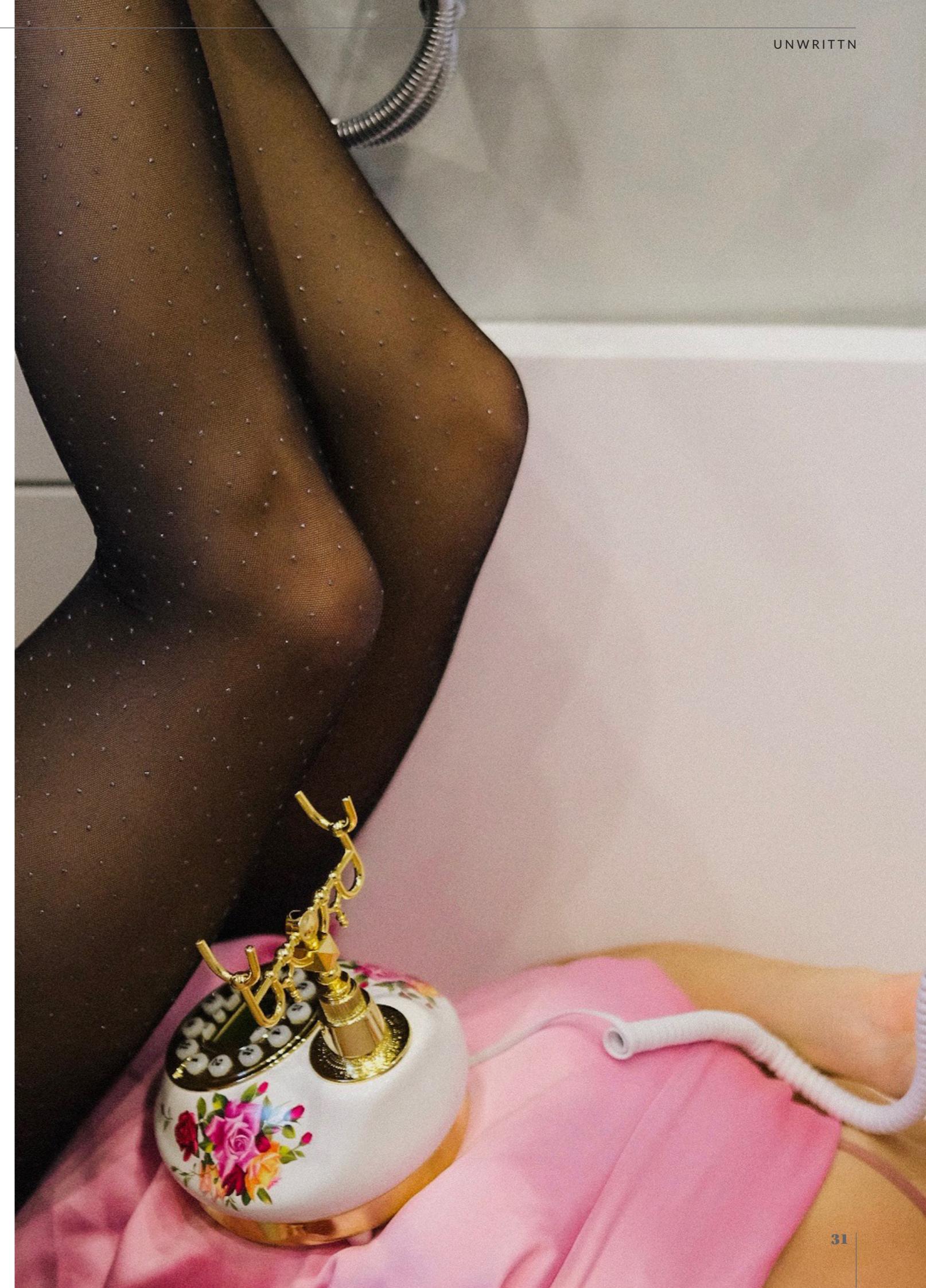
However, as with any other connection, you can spend all the time in the world with yourself, and still not know yourself any better, if you're not intentional with how you spend your time. There needs to be an element of reflection, accountability, and observation in how you are currently moving through the world, and how you want to move through the world.

How you want to be treated, how you currently treat others, and also how you treat yourself. Are you constantly putting yourself down? Are you confident in yourself and your abilities, or are you just pretending to be? Do you really believe you deserve the things you say you do, or are they just words? And if they're not just words, then

do your actions align with this?

The work really does start from within, and believe me when I say, the way you view yourself, will change the way you view the world.

**“LEARN TO ENJOY
YOUR OWN COMPANY.
DO THINGS THAT MAKE
YOU HAPPY ALONE,
AND THEN SAY YES
TO OPPORTUNITIES
WHERE YOU CAN MEET
PEOPLE NATURALLY.”**



MEETING IN THE MIDDLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH ELLIE DOWLING

What does connection mean to you personally?

E: For me it's having a bond or relationship with someone where we have shared experiences and a mutual interest in each others lives.

How does it show up in your life?

E: My relationship with my boyfriend and my friendships with my girls, and my close family.

What is important to you when it comes to your relationships / friendships?

E: A mutual respect and patience with each other where you don't feel judged and feel at peace with each other.

What do you think is missing a lot of the time in connections?

E: I think sometimes a lot can get lost in translation and misunderstanding that can make people feel disconnected, and sometimes poor communication can make this worse. I think everyone has busy lives and sometimes their own things happening that sometimes people may not understand and can lead to breakdowns in those connections.

What is the best way you've found for maintaining your connections?

E: I like to message my friends and family who I don't see very much just to check in and see how everyone is and make sure

we have dates in the diary to have face to face catch ups.

What about when making new connections?

E: Be open minded when meeting new people and be prepared to make a lot of effort to talk and to make plans to meet up even if it feels like you're really putting yourself out there.

How do you think people usually connect / meet nowadays? Why do you think that is?

E: I often meet people through other people, like I have met friends through my boyfriend and his friends, and I have met people through knowing my close friends. I think as you get older people tend to be more relaxed about making plans and are more inclusive.

What is the biggest challenge you have in meeting new people?

E: It can be really hard to meet people as an adult as it can feel like people already have their friends and are happy with them and so it can feel quite daunting to put yourself out there when you aren't sure they are interested.

What expectations do you think you have for your friendships?

E: I like mutual effort with making plans to see each other, and also equally checking in with each other to see how you are.

How do you embody these values yourself?

E: I make sure I reach out to people frequently, and show that I am genuinely interested in what they have to say. I also try and make people know that I am there for them if they ever need me.

What advice would you give people who are struggling with maintaining or making connections?

E: Sometimes I think you have to put yourself out there and reach out to people more initially to show that you are really interested, and this can encourage other people to meet you in the middle and can create that mutual bond. If you can find people with mutual interests as you then you can build a connection from there.



THE TRUTH ABOUT FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS

WORDS BY RAMONA ANECHITE

When you hear the phrase female friendships, what comes to mind? Girls giggling in a corner, sleepovers and hair-braiding, chats about outfits, hair, and nails? Sure, those things exist (minus the pillow fights — sorry boys), but there's so much more beneath the surface.

Too often, these friendships are portrayed as superficial, all about men, or one woman consoling another through tears. And yes, those things happen. But my female friendships are some of the strongest, most powerful relationships I've ever had.

I'm so grateful for the women in my life. It sounds cliché, I know — the power of womanhood and all that. But it's true. I didn't fully understand how transformative these friendships could be until my twenties, and every year since, I've become more and more thankful for them.

In the media, female friendships are often shown as fake or inauthentic — girls who secretly dislike each other. I hate that portrayal. I understand it's a reality for some, and I've been in those dynamics before, too. But looking back, I realise it was never really about the other women. It was about our own internalised insecurities, our own jealousy. So, if you're stuck in that kind of friendship, I genuinely feel

for you — because I know how that feels, and I also know what you're missing out on. And there is a way out.

On the other end of the spectrum, I've also noticed that supportive female friendships are sometimes dismissed or misunderstood. People think 'support' means turning a blind eye to bad decisions or always telling someone they're right. I don't know where that comes from. Maybe I'm just lucky — but every one of my friends will hold me accountable when I'm in the wrong. They push me to reflect, help me find solutions, and challenge me to grow. They believe in me when I don't believe in myself. And I do the same for them, it's second nature. We genuinely want to see each other become the best versions of ourselves. They are my biggest cheerleaders.

Yes, when I'm an inconsolable crying mess, my friends will be there for me. They'll also be there for me when I doubt myself. When I feel good, they'll make me feel better. They'll be there for me when I wake up feeling like crap and everything irritates me. Or when I think that my dreams and ambitions are silly, and that I should give up. Either way, they'll knock some sense into me.

It still feels a bit strange, having people around me who are just there, so consistently, so lovingly. Even though I offer the same in return, I sometimes feel this strange urge to repay their kindness immediately — like I'm in their debt. I think that's a symptom of how individualistic our society is becoming — we've started to treat every kind act like a transaction. But the truth is, we do repay each other, just by showing up again and again with the same care and commitment.

We often talk about how others show up for us — the good and the bad — but how often do we reflect on how we show up for them? And before anyone says, "I do everything for so-and-so and get nothing back" — then leave. Don't stay in a one-sided friendship, girl or boy. You're only hurting yourself. If we want real, meaningful connections, we have to be real and meaningful ourselves. Show the same level of love, honesty and loyalty you want to receive.

When we're taught to compete rather than connect, we miss out on the kind of strength that only female friendships can give us. We place romantic relationships above our friendships — and while romantic relationships are important, I don't

see why they need to compete with each other. They're different dynamics that hold separate spaces in our lives. There's space for both.

Female friendships haven't always been this way, however. Especially growing up. These friendships used to be messier, more insecure, a little performative, and definitely more competitive. And honestly, that wasn't all on us. We were growing up in environments — school, social media, all of it — that made it feel like there was only space for one of us to shine at a time. Like another girl's success somehow meant less for you. But as I've grown, so have the women around me, I've learned to let go of that. We're not here to compete, we're here to hold each other up.

But the light heartedness of the

friendships are also important. Like the times we pay too much for overpriced organic chocolate, get wine drunk, take out a notebook and decide to therapize our lives while listening to 1985 by Bo Burnham on repeat.

The truth is, my female friendships have been the most healing, grounding, and empowering relationships in my life. It's a shame they're so often trivialised. But maybe that's intentional. If women are shamed out of building deep bonds with each other, we never realise how strong we are together.

And then the men will win!

I'm joking. It's really not about one gender over another. It's about embracing the power of the female connections around you. I promise, you'll feel more ful-

filled. Every time I'm with my friends, it's like I've been hit with a whole bucket of love. And all I want to do is throw it right back at them.

Ignoring that slightly aggressive analogy — the spectrum of female friendship is vast. Sometimes deep, sometimes delightfully shallow. And I love every bit of it.





ADVICE TO THE DISCONNECTED

*D*isconnection is something we all experience. It is usually not a personal failure, but part of life. People drift apart, routines take over, and silence breeds where there used to be presence. At times, it feels easier to hide away than to try again.

But what we have learned through the voices in this issue is that everyone seeks connection, no matter how well it's hidden. Everyone shares the same fears and the same anxieties, and ultimately, everyone wants the same solution.

It's scary to take action, make the first move, send the first message, when you don't know what the outcome will be. But what moments in life do we really know the outcomes of?

It's important to know yourself, know the people around you, and approach your connections in a genuine way. If you lead with pure intentions and a true heart, you'll never really go astray.

There will be times when conversations feel a little shallower, when bonds loosen, and when the effort of reaching out feels too much. That does not mean connection is lost forever. It can return, take new forms, and it can be found in places or people we did not expect.

If you are unsure where to start, start small. Send the text you have been putting off, check in without a reason. Show up in a way that is manageable and genuine. Connection is not about getting it perfect, but about making the attempt in the first place.

And if you feel alone, know that the feeling itself is shared. In recognising that, we are already closer than we think.





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THANK YOU FOR READING