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“The Remainder of the Self”: A Celebration of Female Friendships

I am— without a doubt— the person I am today because of the people I surround myself with.

The people we choose to be with dictate so much about ourselves: they shape us for the better to be stronger, smarter, and braver; they know how to tap us on the shoulder when we're off track, and are there to celebrate our successes. It feeds self-recognition through others, which, to me, is the most transcendental part of any relationship. We learn about ourselves through learning about others, establishing the assertion that we are all connected, intertwined in our struggles and pains as we are to our joys and exaltations.

I didn't truly grasp the depth of what this meant until I moved in with my three best friends during my second year of college. We had to sign our lease early, only two months into knowing each other, due to the competitive housing market in our college town. Part of me was nervous about signing a legal document that would bind me to these girls for at least a year after knowing them for only two months. Any doubts or fears I had, however, were immediately shut down once we moved in together. Four 19-year-olds navigated adult life, as if watched over by some divine force: they saw through our six-month-long battle with our landlord over a broken dishwasher, coached each other through job interview questions and read flash cards for each

other to study for midterms. They saw us stay up until 3 a.m., sipping \$5.99 sparkling wine, spinning alternate realities edging on insanity and falling no short of delusion.

There has been a surge in research over the enriching benefits of female friendships in the past two decades. Studies show that women who have close friendships are [less likely to develop physical impairments](#) as they age and they are much [more likely to be living vital, exciting lives](#)—not to mention women live longer than men to begin with. There is even research suggesting that not having close female friendships can be as detrimental to one's health as smoking. It [spikes the happy hormones](#), serotonin and oxytocin which reduces stress, anxiety and even improves heart health, and [can even make us more successful](#) in the workplace.

Science alone can not cover everything within the intricacies that make this bond sacred— it's why [Sister Joan Chittister](#) wrote, “Friendship is the linking of stories. It is a spiritual act, not a social one. It is the finding of the remainder of the self.”

When I look at my friends, I see their spirits. I see their tenderness, vulnerability, the love that radiates off them in such an infectious way that it exudes into every bone in my body and into my soul. They feel spiritual because there feels to be something greater than the four of us when we are all in the house together.

I specify *female* friendships as the remainder of self not only because of my own experiences but also because I think the intimacy that women are able to share with each other rests in how we communicate. I saw a [video](#) online that reminded me of [one of my favorite academic articles](#),

which explained how women communicate face-to-face while men stand shoulder-to-shoulder. This refers to the notion that, generally speaking, men are more likely to talk to each other about activities— sports, video games, cars— they stand together but look out on the world around them. Women, still generally speaking, are more comfortable conversing introspectively with fewer distractions. They are more comfortable being affectionate with each other and less afraid of intimacy.

Men's relationships with one another are greatly limited by the pressures of toxic masculinity. It's not that men aren't as relational as women are— after all, all babies, regardless of gender, gaze into their mothers eyes in the same way of needing that relational exchange of energy that is crucial to children's early development. [There is no evidence](#) to suggest that the sex or gender of the child affects this need in any way, yet they learn different social scripts as they grow according to the invasive gender roles that dictate how we communicate with one another. “Boys don't cry” and “real men don't ask for help” are the general hegemonic rules that boys are taught and society perpetuates out of a deeply-rooted fear of being perceived as feminine. Women are able to be more intimate with each other because of the simple reason that we don't have masculinity to prove.

There's a favorite 'alternate reality' of mine that my friends and I spend more time talking about than we probably should: we call it “The Commune”. In this version of the future, we live on a self-sustaining farm, supported by a mysterious fortune one of us stumbles into. In this reality, we're free from the conveyor belts that so many 20-something college students feel trapped on as we rush into the job market. Instead, we live in the feminine joy of domesticity—not tied to

patriarchal expectations but connected to the earth. Maybe the divine force that seems to be behind us is something feminist– guiding us to unlearn capitalist expectations and monetary goals that are supposed to produce joy and instead focus on our relationships that enrich our lives in more sustainable, holistic ways. It's divinely feminist to look introspectively at our place in society through conversations with others with different scopes of perspective– it's how we find the remainder of the self.