

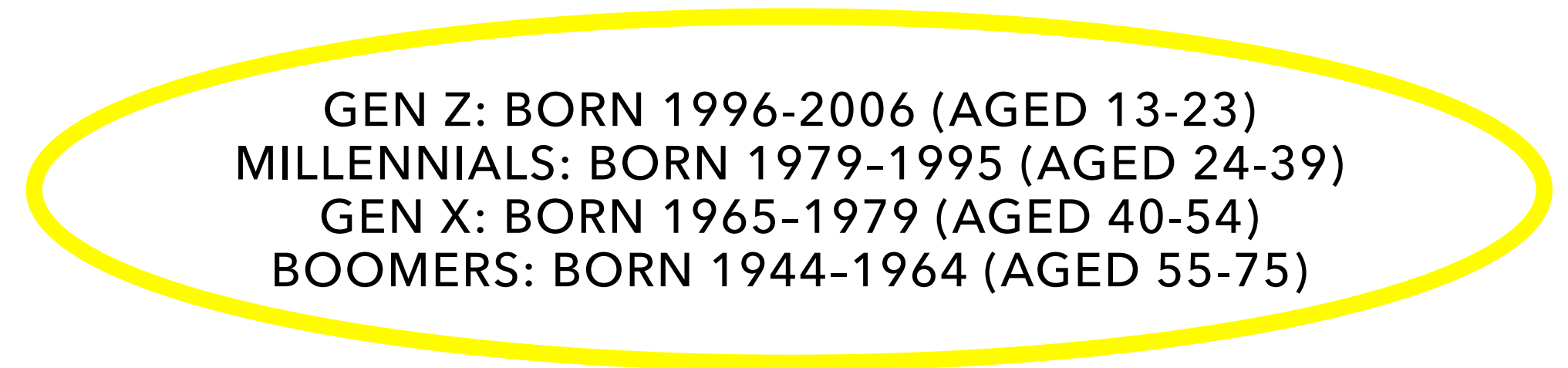
# THE FRIENDSHIP REPORT



Snapchat was founded in 2011 on the belief that talking with photos and videos, with our real friends, was more personal and more fun than texting or keeping up on social media. Since then, the company has been evolving the platform but never deviating from this core mission of helping close friends express themselves and be creative together.

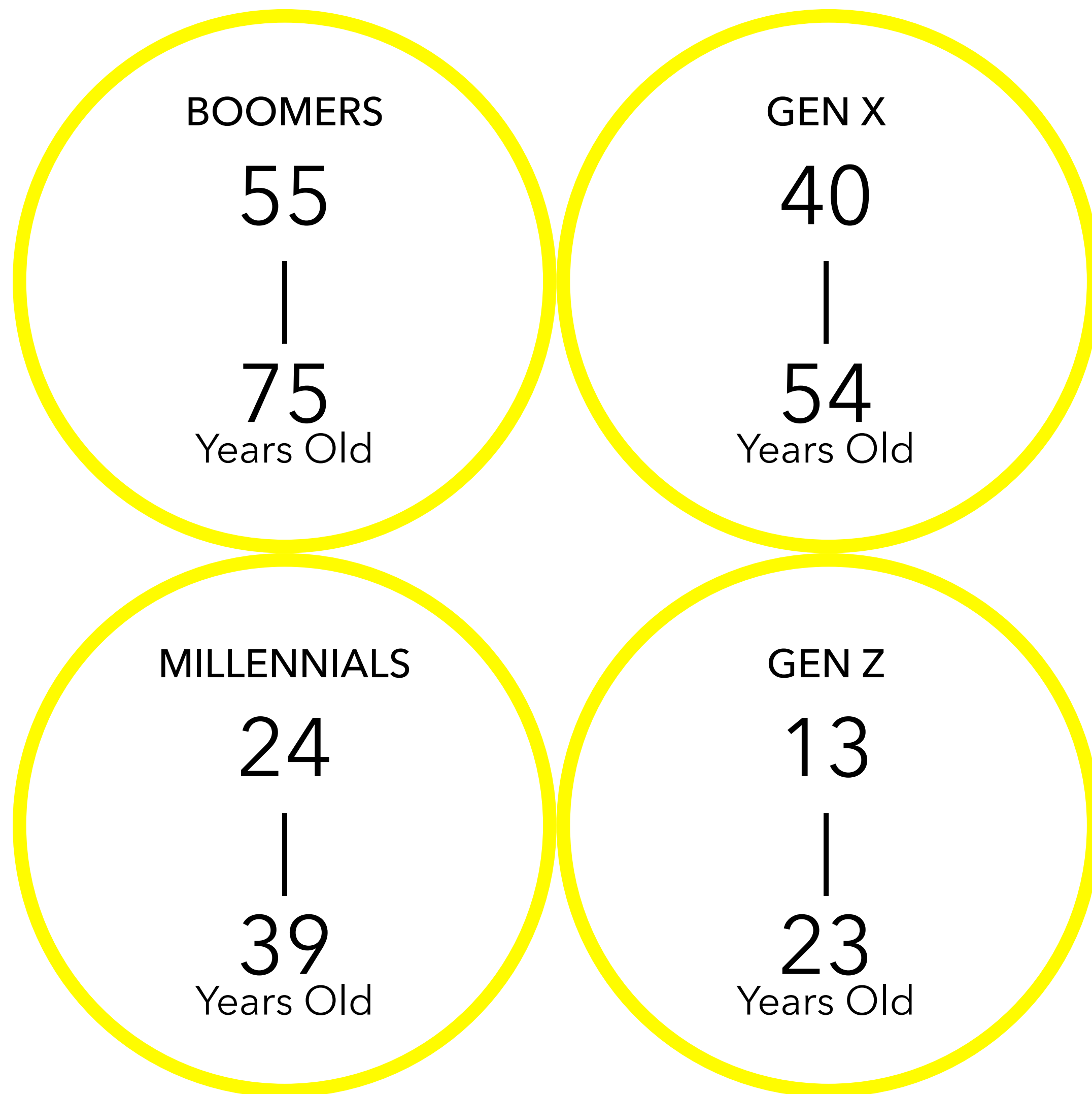
With the goal of really understanding what friendship is all about, all around the world, Snap undertook a massive global study around friendship.

We engaged 10,000 nationally representative people aged 13-75 in Australia, France, Germany, India, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK, and the US, broken down into the four main generation groups—

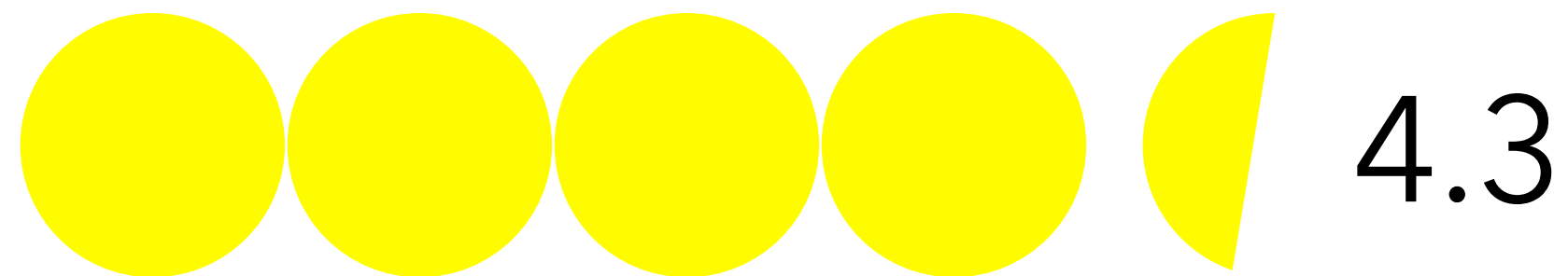


We asked them questions about friendship including how many friends they have, how and where they meet their circle of friends, what qualities they look for in a best friend, what topics they do and don't talk about with their friends, how they communicate with each other, how they resolve fights, and what they want to *change* about their friendships.

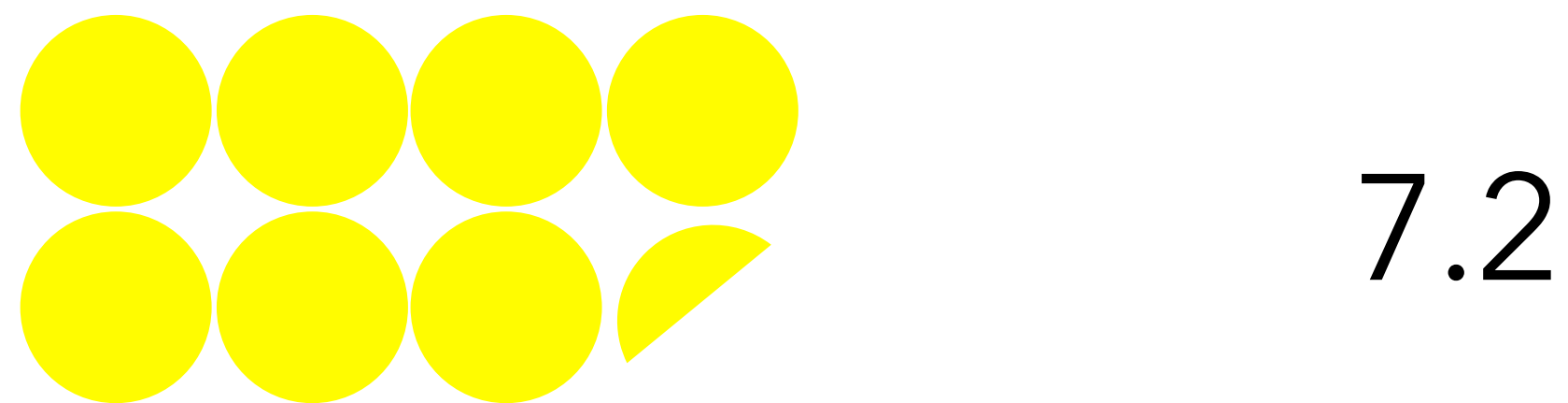
Ten experts on friendship from around the world helped our team to contextualize the data, giving reasons for the findings we unearthed and explained the differences and similarities between generations and cultures.



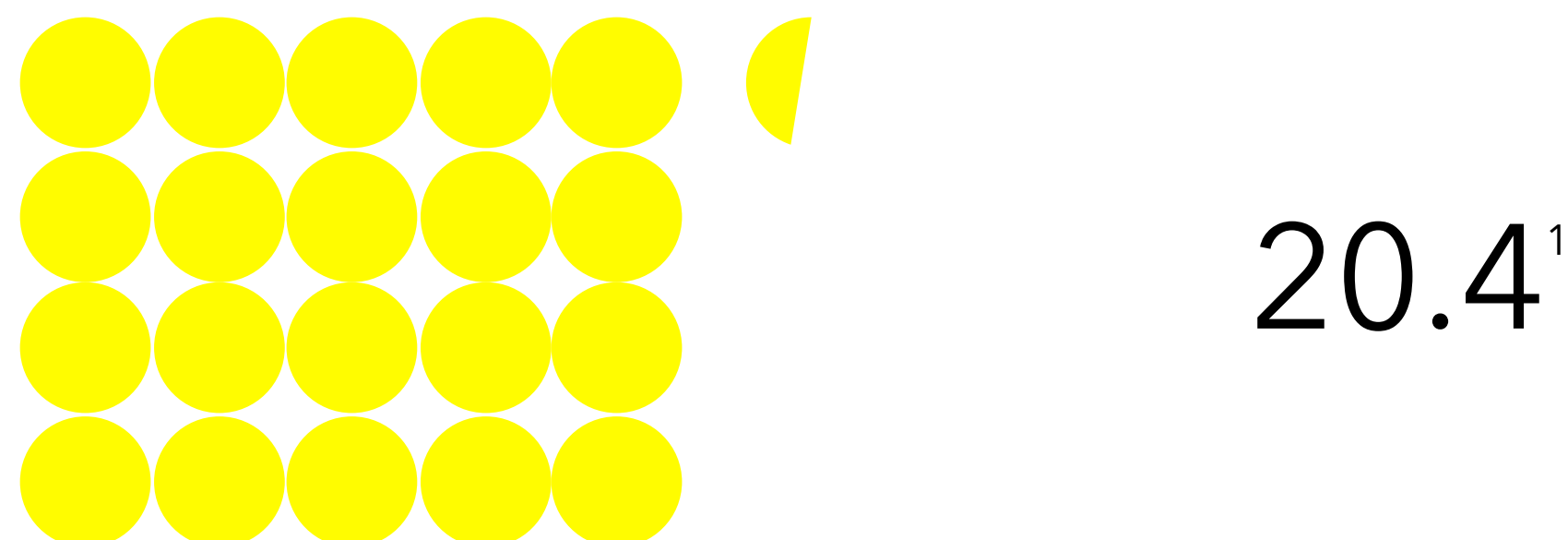
## AVERAGE NUMBER OF BEST FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD



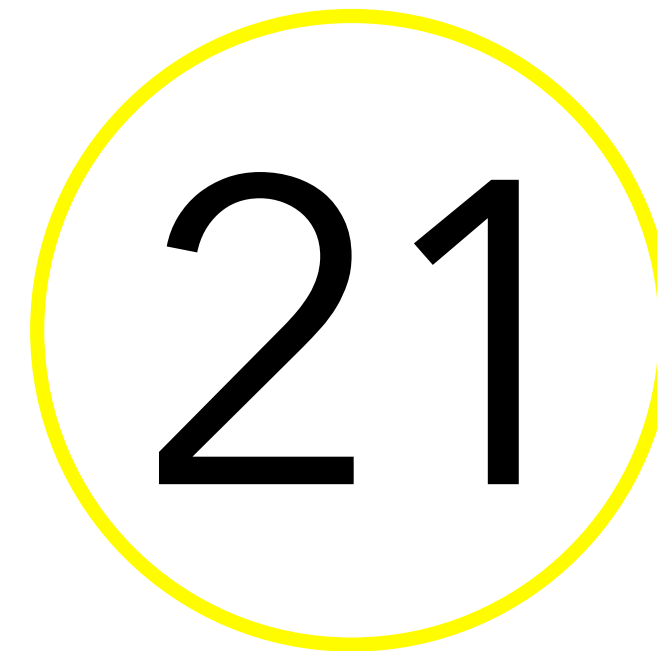
## AVERAGE NUMBER OF GOOD FRIENDS



## AVERAGE NUMBER OF ACQUAINTANCES



## AVERAGE AGE WHEN MOST PEOPLE MEET THEIR BEST FRIEND:



## THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES WE SEEK OUT IN OUR BESTIES:

Honesty + authenticity

## THE LEAST IMPORTANT QUALITY WE SEEK OUT IN OUR BESTIES:

Having a large social network

<sup>1</sup>  
Definitions:  
Best friends: someone you share everything with.  
Good friends: someone you rely on and can trust.  
Acquaintances: someone you are friendly with but your relationship is not as deep or vulnerable.



We learned that Gen Z is adjusting their approach to friendship away from the Millennial desire for widespread networks and are looking for more closeness and intimacy with a smaller group, that love plays a stronger role in platonic relationships than we ever knew before, and that communicating with emojis, pictures, and videos can bring more clarity than text.

Above all, we came away with a powerful image of what friendship looks like today and an understanding of just how and why it's more important and valued than ever.

# EXPERTS

GERMANY  
**Wolfgang Kruger**  
Psychotherapist and author of *The Difficult Luck of Friendship*

INDIA  
**Amit Desai**  
Co-author of *The Ways of Friendship* and lecturer in anthropology at the London School of Economics

SAUDI ARABIA / UAE  
**Roudha al Marri**  
Co-author of *UAE 101: Stories and Cultural Learnings*

UK  
**Professor Thomas Dixon**  
Presenter of the BBC’s *500 Years of Friendship*

UK  
**Kate Leaver**  
Journalist and author of *The Friendship Cure*

US  
**Miriam Kirmayer**  
Therapist and Ph.D. candidate in clinical psychology specializing in interpersonal relationships

US  
**Bill Rawlins**  
Professor of Interpersonal Communication at Ohio University

GEN Z & MILLENNIAL  
**Dana Kerford**  
Author of *The Friendship Project* and teacher specializing in youth friendship

GEN Z & MILLENNIAL  
**Lillian Ahenkan**  
Gen Z expert on millennials and happiness

GEN Z  
**Chloe Combi**  
Journalist and author of *Generation Z: Their Voices, Their Lives*



Credit: Anurag Banerjee, India

1

# FRIENDSHIP AROUND THE WORLD



# THE AGE PARADOX—

Gen Z have more in common with Boomers from other cultures than they do with their own grandparents

Our study of nine regions affirms that friendship is deeply valued in every country and generation. Our findings also revealed country-specific nuances regarding how many friends people have, how many they want, and what type of friendships they need.

According to Amit Desai, a lecturer in anthropology at the London School of Economics and co-author of *The Ways of Friendship*, a book on the importance of friendship around the world,

**“Everyone in the world wants friendship but what does that look like in practice? That can be highly culturally specific.”**





Credit: Oli Kristen, Germany

Some cultures value a wider friendship circle than others which may be down to a different interpretation of friendship. In India, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, people report having three times the number of best friends than those in Australia, Europe, and the US. Saudi Arabia has the highest average number of best friends at 6.6, whereas the UK has the lowest at 2.6. While the US does not have the lowest number of best friends on average, people there are most likely to report having only one best friend.

Those in India, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia are four times more likely than other regions to say that a “large social network” is an essential quality to have in a best friend, and they are twice as likely to want a friend who “reflects the person I aspire to be.”<sup>2</sup> Being “intelligent and cultured” is more valued by those in India, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, whereas being “non-judgemental” matters more to those in Australia, Europe, and the US.<sup>3</sup>

Amit notes that the meaning and practice of friendship has huge variations and nuances across the regions, but very broadly speaking there is a difference in friendship ideals between Australia, Europe, and the US, and between India,

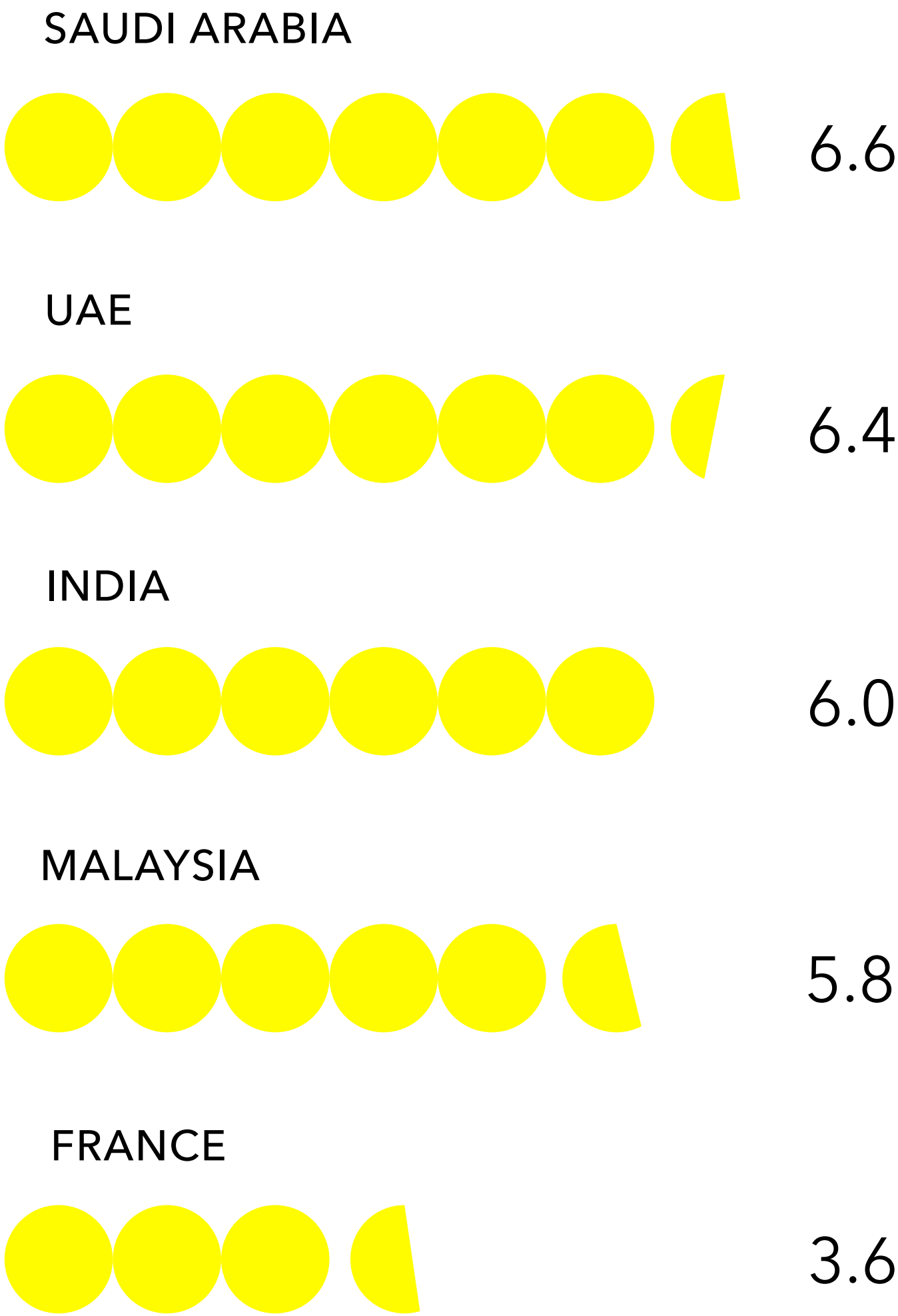
the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. The basis of intimate friendship in countries like Australia, the UK, and the US is about finding people who are like you and bonding over your similarities. Professor Thomas Dixon, presenter of the BBC’s *500 Years of Friendship* and our UK friendship expert, confirms this feature of many western relationships stating, “One of the key ideals is that a friendship is equal and a lot of what I have seen is people becoming friends with people like themselves.” It makes sense that western respondents would want a friendship to be non-judgemental when their friends are often reflections of themselves. It also explains why they may have only two or three best friends, as it is hard to find people similar to yourself.

Amit notes that in many Asian countries, including India, friendship is focused on an understanding that a relationship can rely on exchange as well as equality, “I do this for you, so you do this for me.” Therefore it makes sense to have a network of best friends who may serve different purposes, and to find new friends that bring a variety of complementary qualities to your life.

2  
22% in India, Middle East & Southeast Asia, vs 11% in the US, Europe & Australia

3  
33% in India, Middle East & Southeast Asia, vs 43% in the US, Europe & Australia

AVERAGE NUMBER OF BEST FRIENDS PER COUNTRY:





Surprisingly, different age groups from separate cultures frequently have more in common than might be expected.

In India, Boomers are the generation most likely to want their friendship group to be more diverse in terms of age, gender, race or sexuality (32%), while Gen Z is the least likely (23%). In the US, we found the opposite, with Gen Z wanting more diverse friendships (24%) than Boomers (12%). Gen Z's from both countries align in their desire for diversity, but Gen Z in the US are closer in attitude to the Boomers in India, rather than the Boomers in their own country—aka their grandparents! In another example, Boomers in Saudi Arabia have more in common with Gen Z in Australia, as both groups are highest in their respective countries for putting best friends first (50%), and wanting to expand their social circles.

Our US expert, Miriam Kirmayer, is a therapist and Ph.D. candidate in clinical psychology specializing in interpersonal relationships. She argues that the benefit of embracing a more diverse friendship group is two-fold.



We see that when it comes to the platforms the generations look to for help in diversifying their social circle, Boomers overwhelmingly choose LinkedIn and are ten times more likely than Gen Z to pick that platform. Millennials and Gen X choose WhatsApp, while Gen Z looks to a spread of WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat, and is the most likely of all four generations to turn to Snapchat to open up to make their circle more inclusive.

**“On the one hand, learning that you share something meaningful with someone from a completely different background can be an incredible catalyst for connection. On the flip side, there is an increased recognition of the value of befriending someone who is *not* like us; this difference might be the shared value that brings people together—fulfilling their desire for new experiences, knowledge, and personal growth.”**

—MIRIAM KIRMAYER

Globally, 88% of people enjoy talking to their friends online. Our respondents were able to select multiple options to explain what they enjoy about online communication, and there is an agreement about the benefits. Across all regions, 32% of people chose the ability to “talk to their friends faster and more easily” as their favored explanation for why online works so well for them, and over 25% of people also like that it allows them to multitask.

Gen Z and Millennials are unsurprisingly emphatic in their love for talking with friends online—only 7% and 6% respectively said they don’t enjoy it, compared with 13% of Gen X and 26% of Boomers. Only 23% of people in Saudi Arabia and 26% of people in the US chose being “able to talk to their friends more often than they would otherwise” as a reason for talking to friends online, compared with 37% of people in France and Malaysia. People in India, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia are twice as likely at 30% to say that talking online allows them to be “more playful and funny” than people in Australia, Europe, and the US at 15%. Boomers are less interested in being “more playful and funny” as only 10% chose this option, compared to 26% of Gen Z and Millennials.



Bombay, India based photographer Anurag Banerjee spent time with pairs of friends spanning each generation— Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers—to explore what friendship means to them, how it's expressed and the spaces it occupies around the city.



Credit: Anurag Banerjee, India

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Credit: Anurag Banerjee, India





# THE GENDER (NON)GAP—

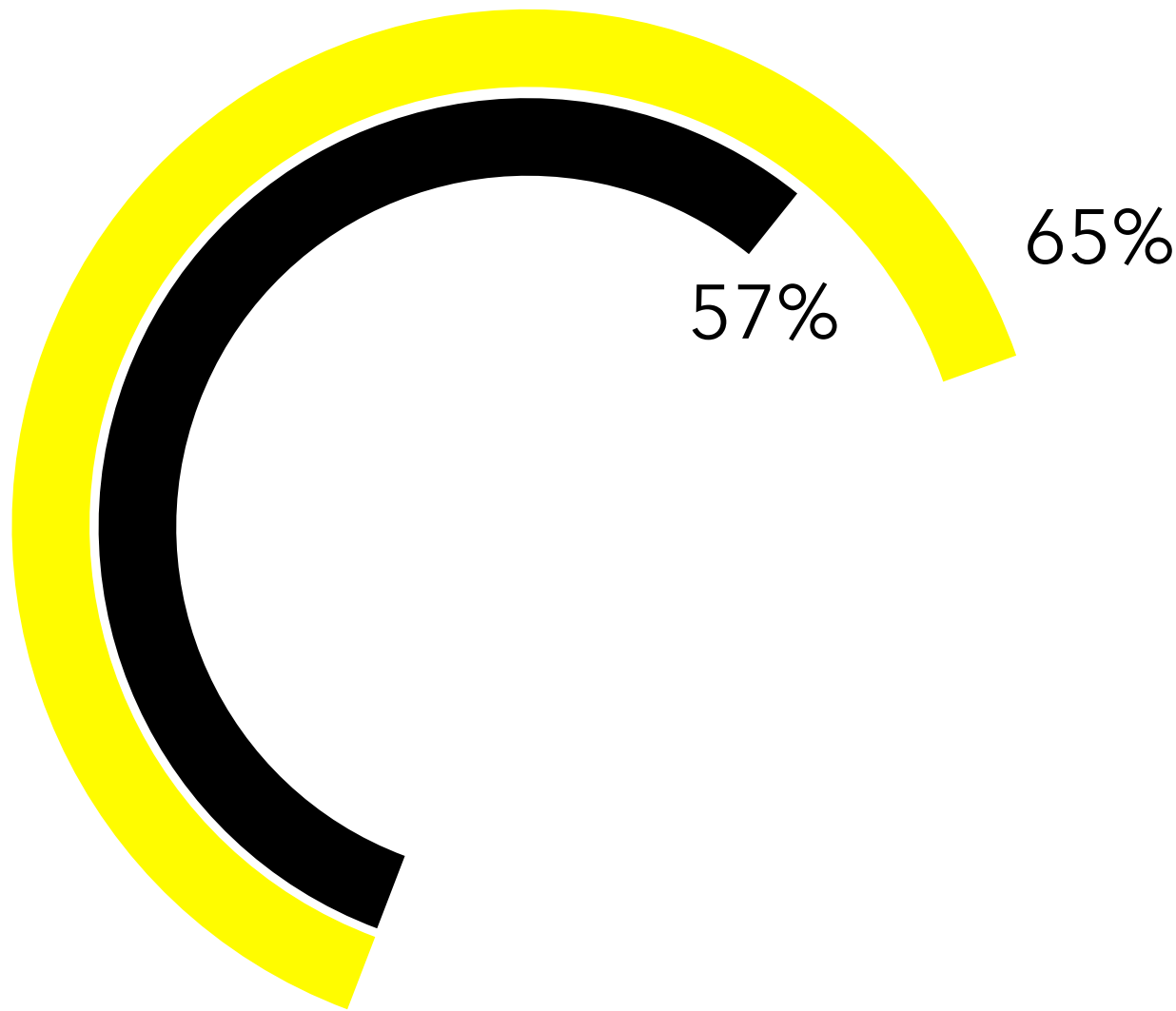
Friendships still adhere to some traditional gender norms, but the dynamics are shifting globally

From pop culture to parenting books, it's been ingrained in many of us that male and female friend relationships look very different. We wanted to explore that.

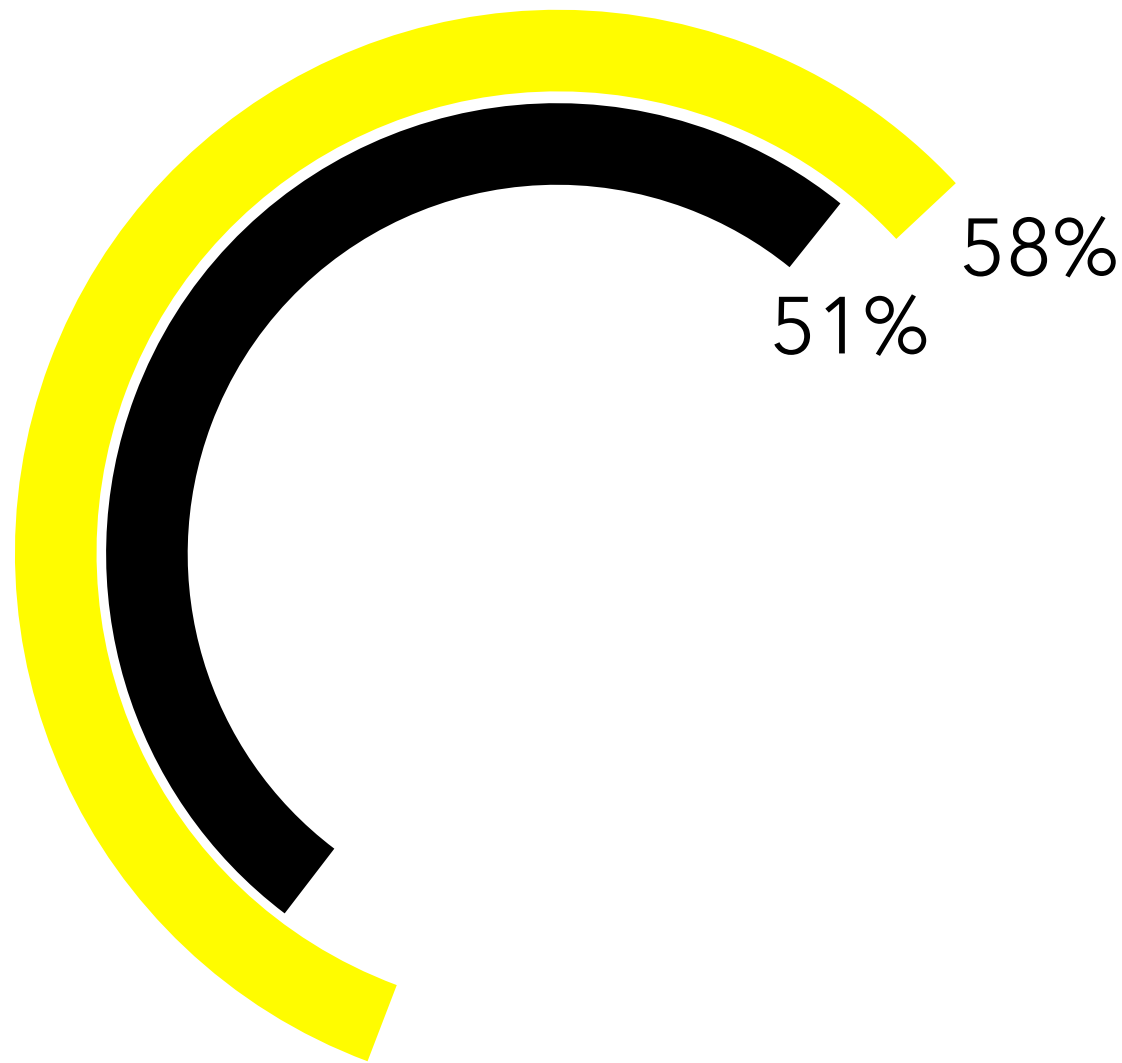
Of our 10,000 respondents, 64 identified their gender as non-binary, with the remaining number split equally between males and females. Our numbers reflect one or two of the more heteronormative and stereotypical takes on "male" and "female" friendship. Kate Leaver, journalist and author of *The Friendship Cure*, summarizes these stereotypes as the idea that women are traditionally happy to sit in each other's company and talk with no outside stimulus, whereas the traditional male friendship requires an external focus to which they can both respond.

WHAT ACTIVITIES DO YOU TEND TO DO MOST FREQUENTLY WITH YOUR BEST FRIENDS?

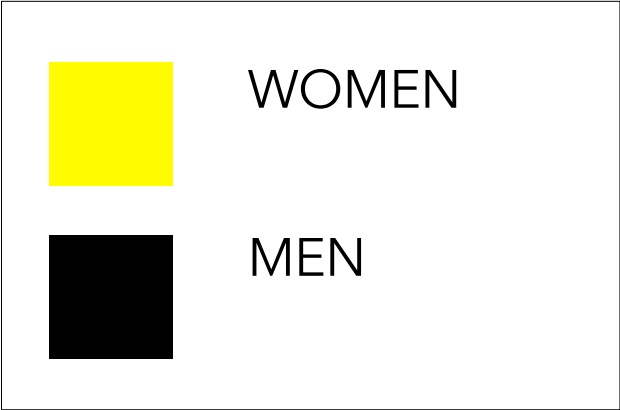
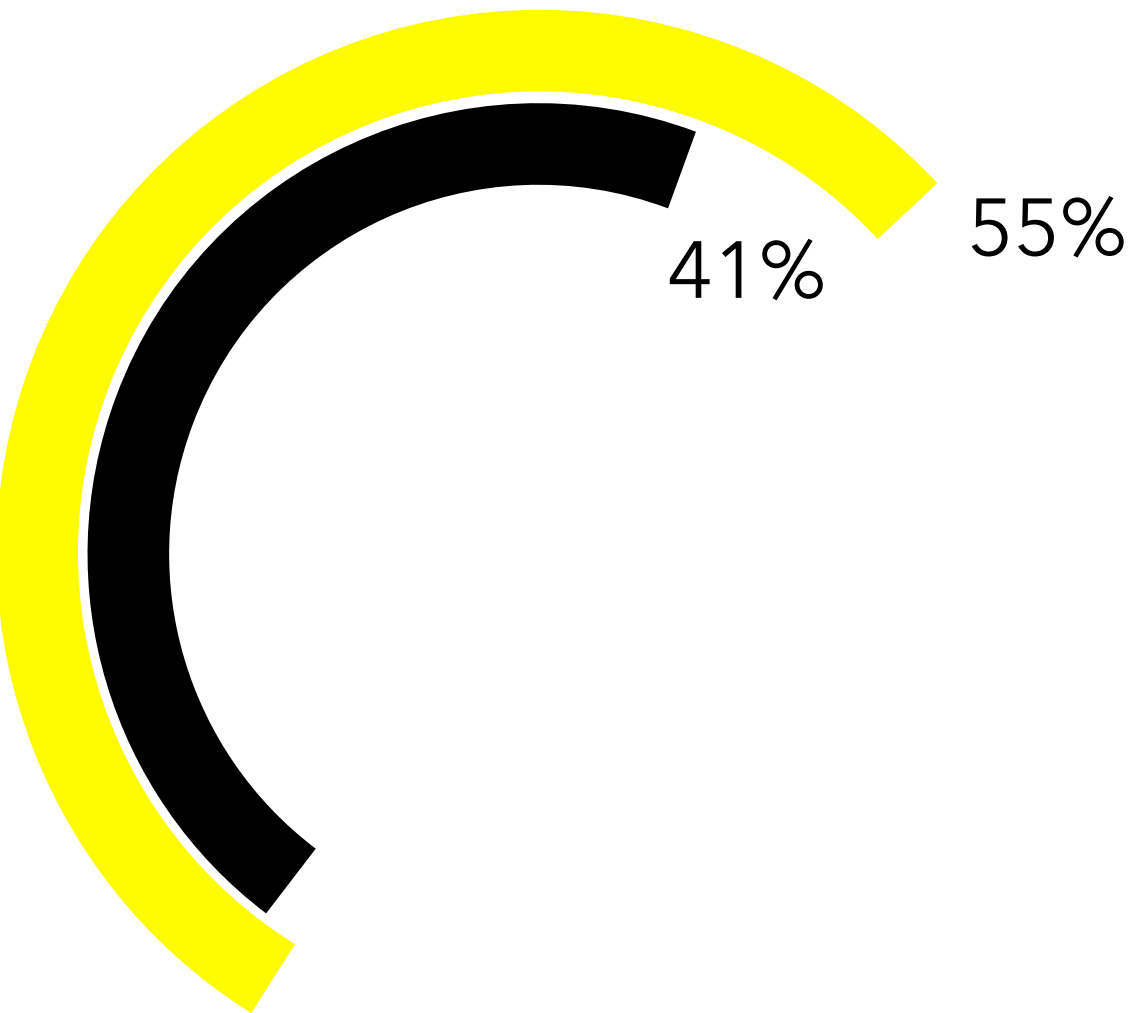
SIT AND TALK



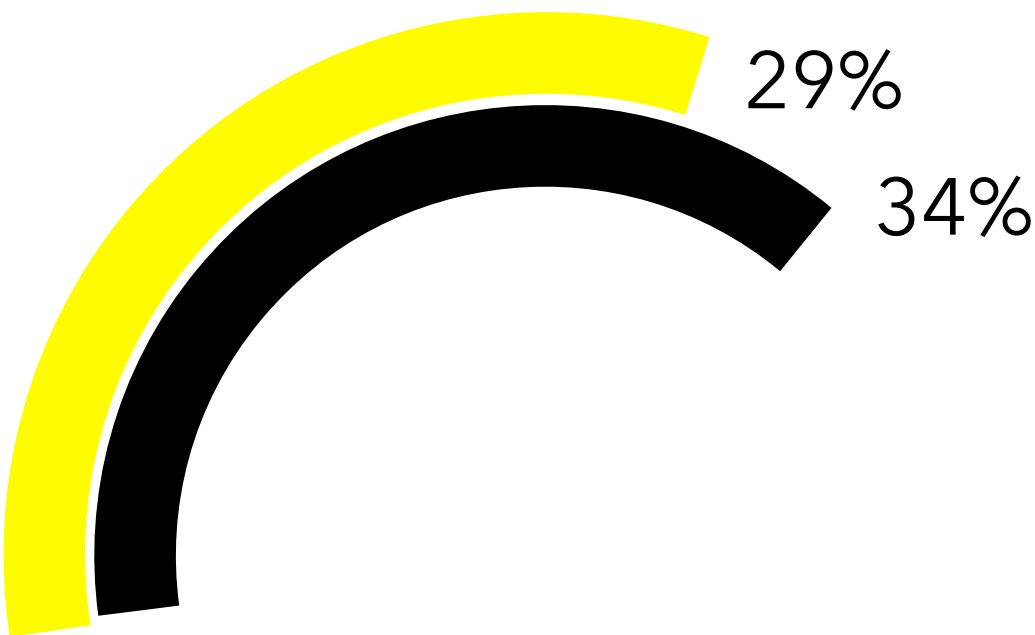
TALK ON THE PHONE



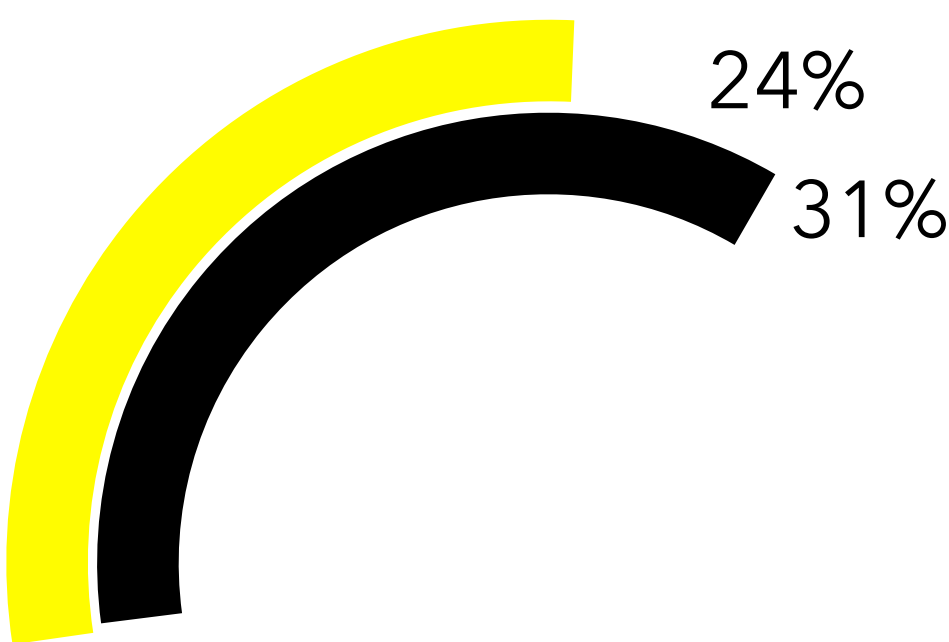
CHAT THROUGH MESSAGES



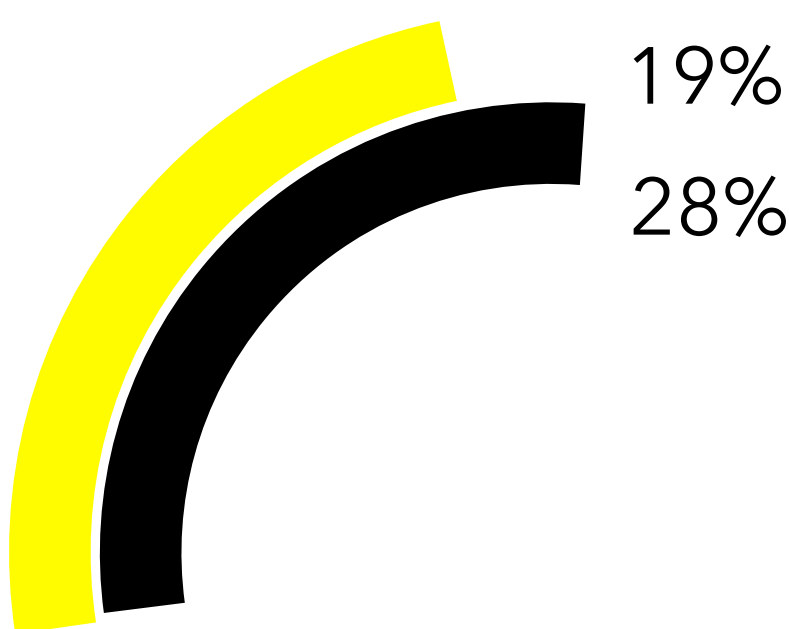
DO SOMETHING ACTIVE



GO TO A BAR/CLUB



PLAY GAMES ONLINE TOGETHER





The gap between these numbers isn't huge and shows a crossover in what men and women find enjoyable. "We tend to think of women's friendships as being much more intimate than men's," Miriam explains, "and there are certainly some meaningful differences. However, as is often the case, the similarities within groups often exceed any differences between them. One of the shifts we are seeing is that men are becoming more aware of, and comfortable with, their need for social connection and intimacy within their friendships. In many cases, it is also increasingly common for men to seek out emotional and physical closeness in their platonic friendships." Bill Rawlins, Professor of Interpersonal Communication at Ohio University, describes an overall shift in how we perceive the differences between male and female friendship due to increasing gender fluidity.

The US is the country with the highest number of people stating that their best friend is someone of the opposite sex to them, with India coming in a close second. Roughly 33% of our respondents in both the US and India align themselves to that statement.<sup>4</sup>

Amit Desai has researched friendship in India extensively, and gives country-specific context for these findings: "If you want to understand why there is such a high number of people in India saying their best friend is of the opposite sex, you need to understand that friendship does not exist in a vacuum... In this instance, this 'opposite sex' friendship is growing in India, and it has come about because romantic relationships have changed."

**"Gender differences have been so significant when looking at friendship, and still give us some important clues, but gender expectations are getting more and more fluid, which is changing the dynamics of friendship between genders."**

—BILL RAWLINS

4  
US—34% Opposite;  
India—32% Opposite;  
Australia—30% Opposite;  
UK—24% Opposite;  
France—24% Opposite;  
Germany—25% Opposite;  
Malaysia—25% Opposite;  
UAE—25% Opposite;  
Saudi Arabia—18% Opposite

Credit: Anurag Banerjee, India





**We have two things, men can now conceive of a woman being their best friend and vice versa, which did not happen before, and we now have friendship groups of men and women mixing, going out, and dating where previously they were segregated. This new type of friendship is being captured and reflected on TV and in the movies, and so people in rural India are being confronted with seeing new ways to behave as friends by watching on screen. And they are learning that it's not shameful for a man to be friends with a woman—the boundaries are blurring."**

—AMIT DESAI

Marriages in urban India have traditionally been arranged by parents, or by a man expressing interest in a woman and then asking parents to arrange it. But there has been a significant shift towards young people seeing marriage in romantic terms that include dating, falling in love, and having a spouse that is also your friend.

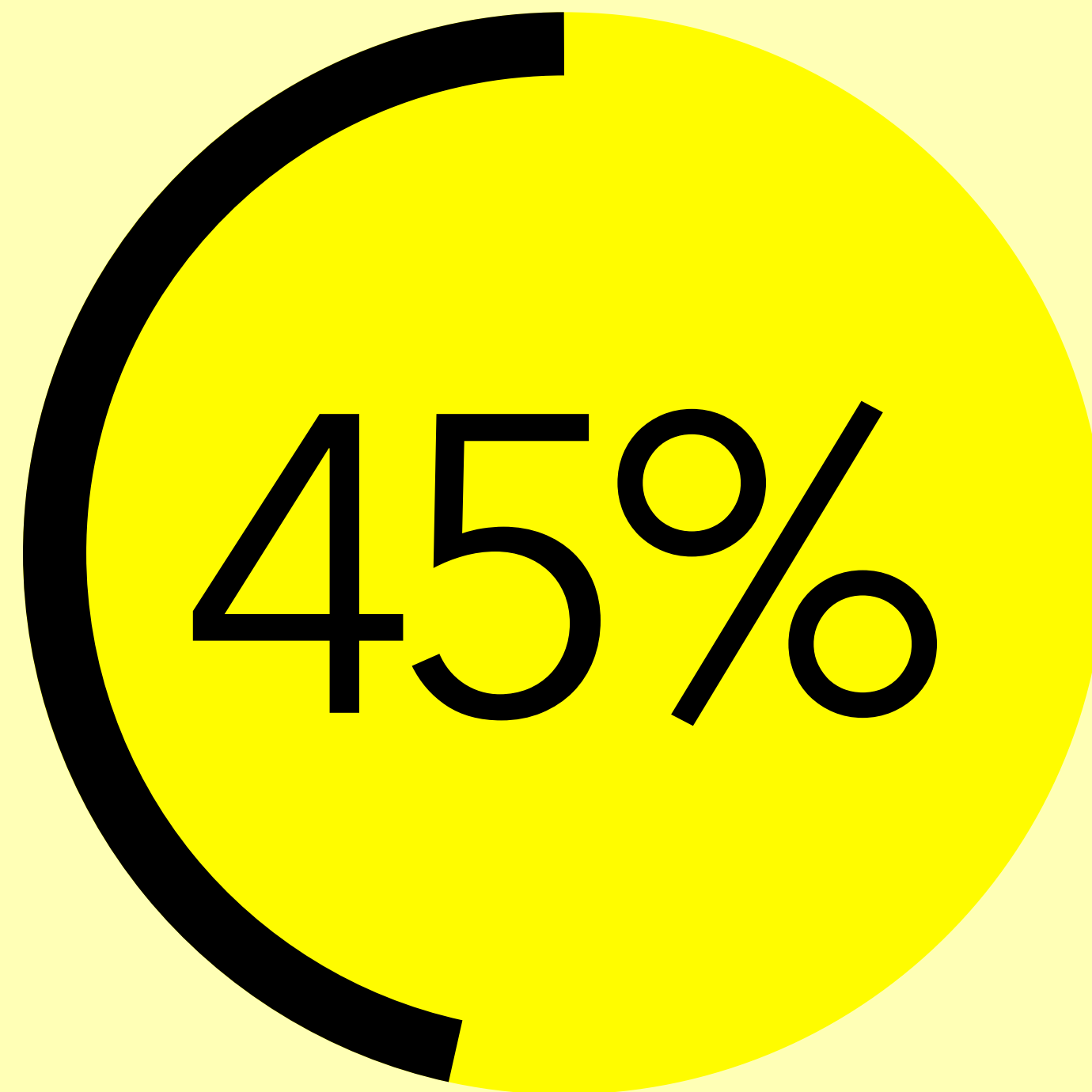
In Saudi Arabia, just 18% of respondents say their best friend is of the opposite sex—the lowest number of all our countries. According to Roudha al Marri, who co-authored a guide on the nuances of Saudi friendship, it is relatively natural and ingrained in Saudi society for men and women to physically separate themselves from one another.<sup>5</sup> This segregation is gradually becoming less common in the workplace, at school, and at university, and the rise of social media and messaging apps and being online is breaking the barriers down further. "The ability to communicate without being in the same physical space has improved communication between genders. Men and women can develop friendships in a way that has not been possible before and is still hard to do face to face."

5  
UAE 101: Stories and Cultural Learnings

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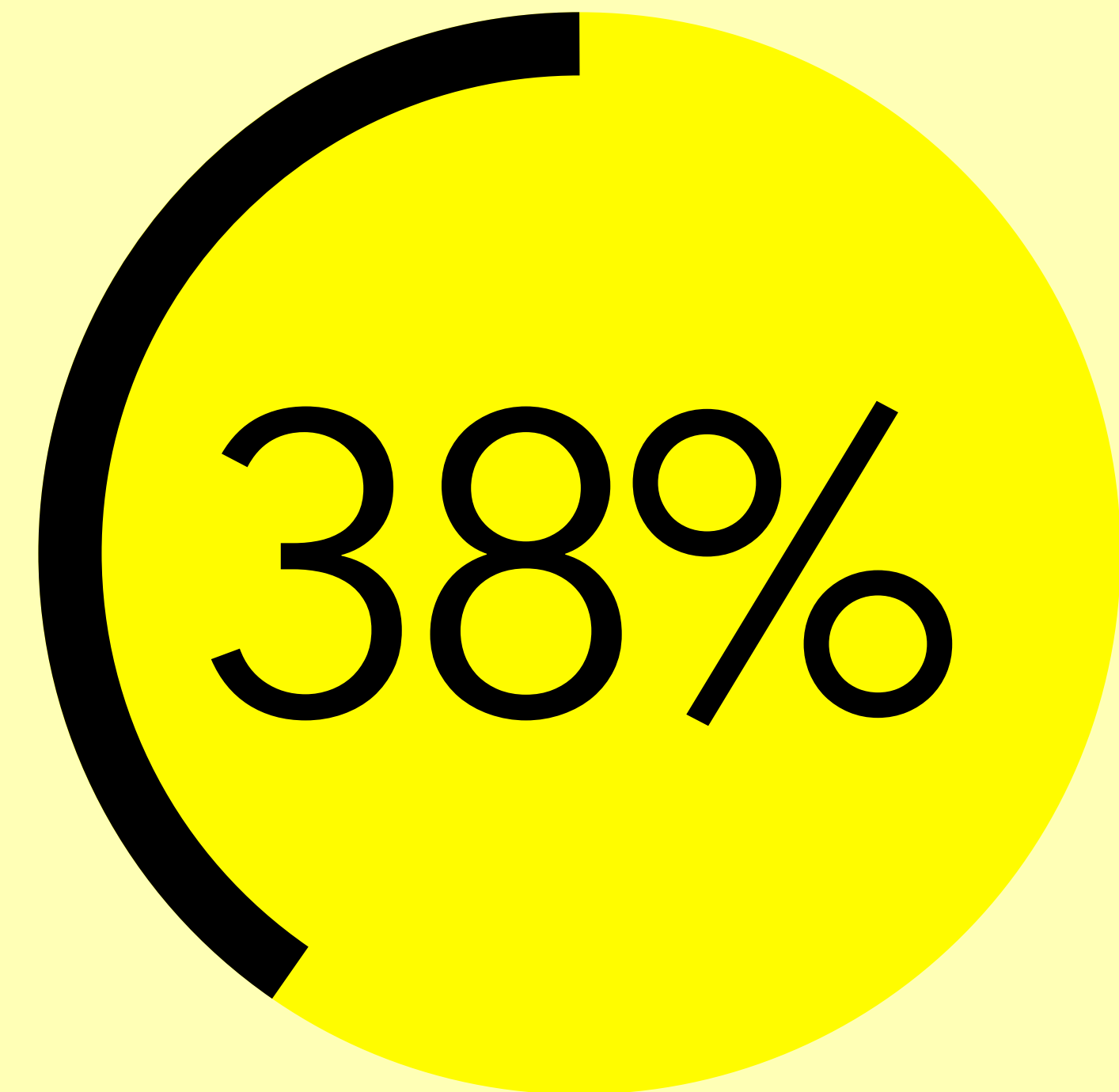
## THE FRENCH ARE FAMOUS FOR ROMANCE...

Between ages 13-19, the French are the most likely to be comfortable sharing details of their love life with their best friends with 45% saying they would discuss the topic. Those in the UK were the least comfortable sharing at this age, with only 29% feeling happy to talk about the topic.



**AGED 13-19 IN FRANCE WHO WOULD DISCUSS  
THEIR LOVE LIFE WITH THEIR BEST FRIENDS**

Between ages 20-24, the French are still the most confident market when it comes to chatting love life details, with 38% saying they would talk to their best friends about the topic. Interestingly though, at the same age, the French are the least likely to be talking about relationship issues with their best friends, with only 19% happy to discuss the less rosy side of love—compared with an average of 29% for the other markets!

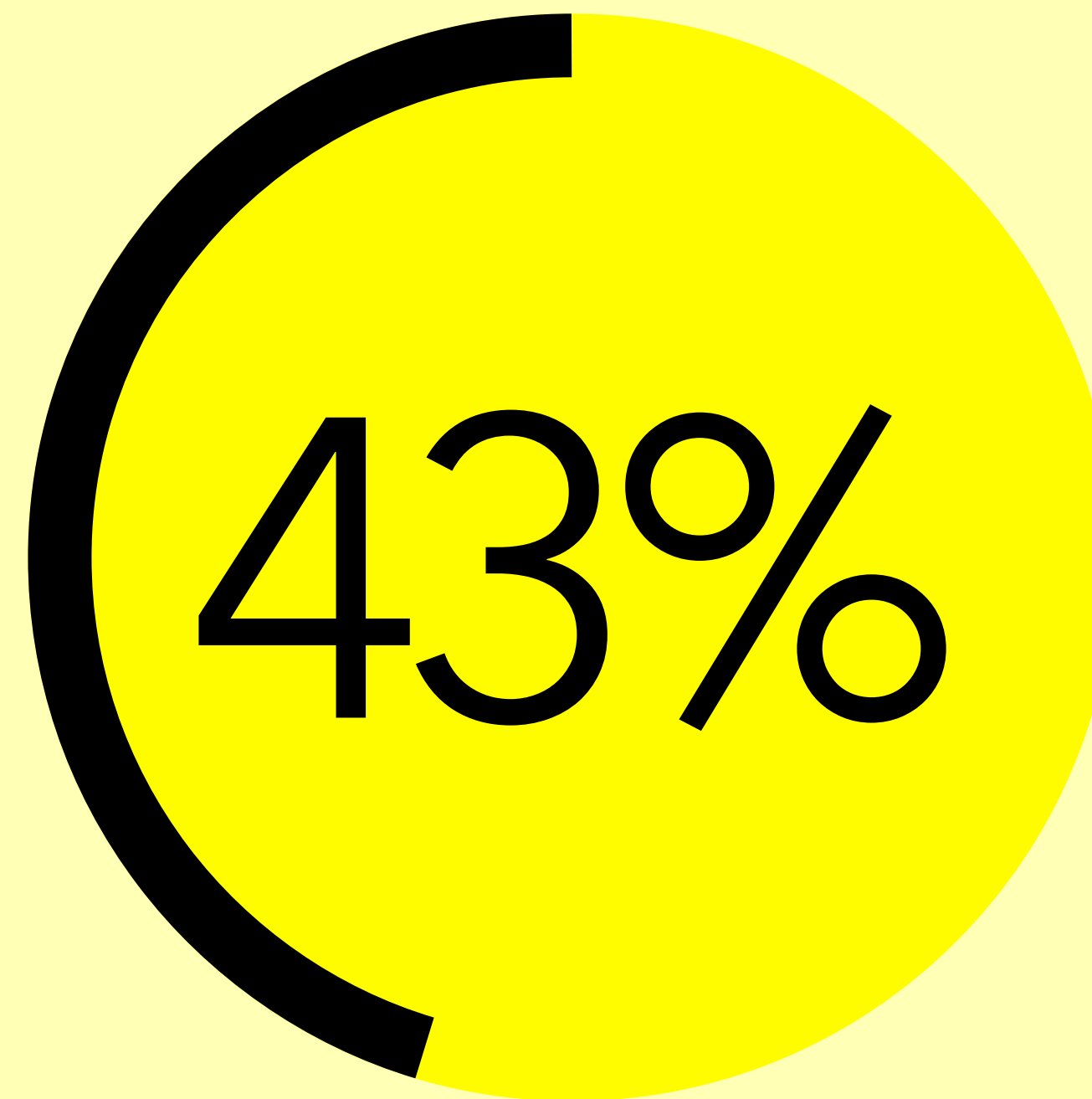


**AGED 20-24 IN FRANCE WHO WOULD DISCUSS  
THEIR LOVE LIFE WITH THEIR BEST FRIENDS**

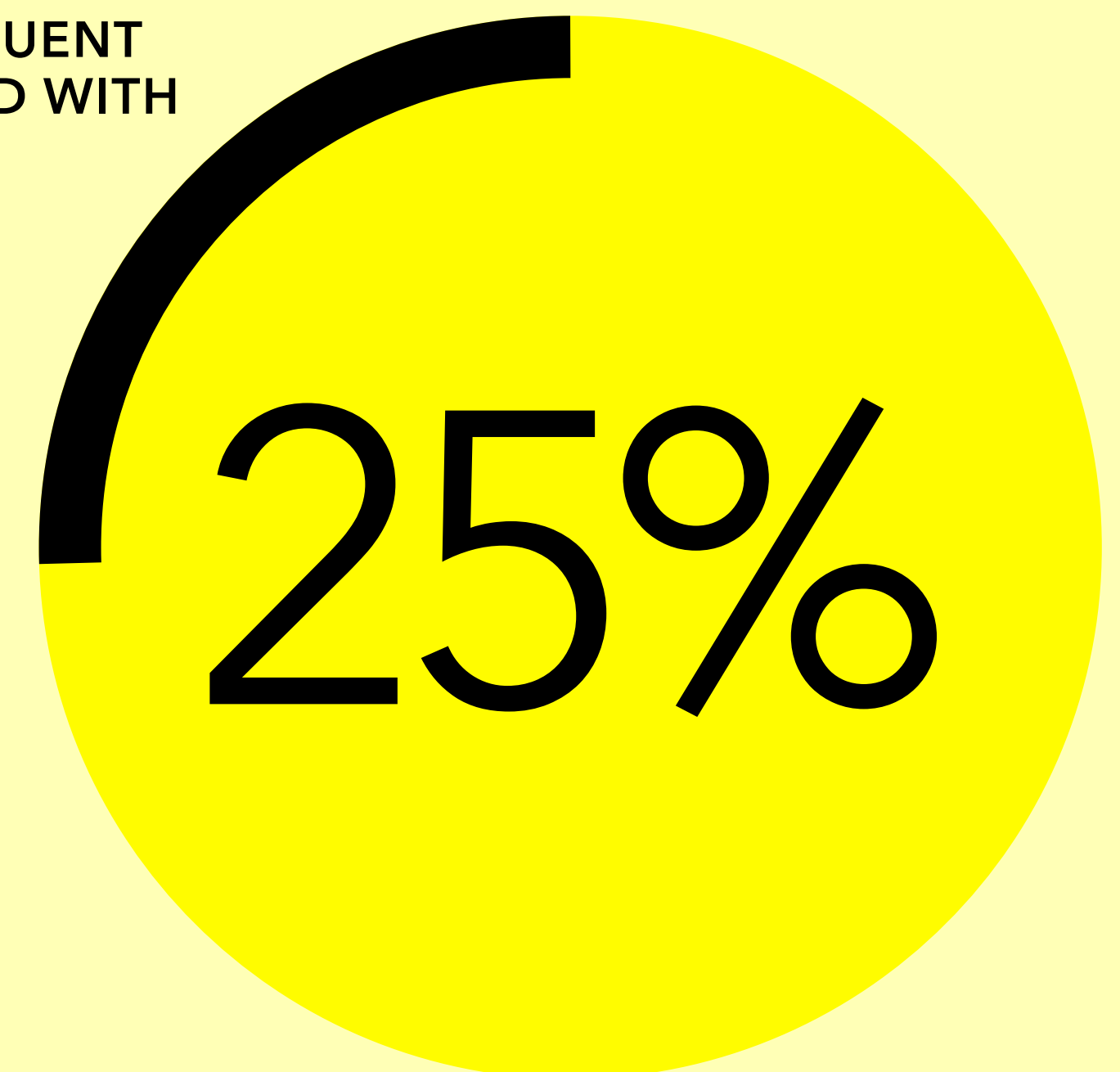
# IF YOU WANT A BESTIE IN INDIA OR THE UAE, POLISH UP ON YOUR ART HISTORY, BUT IF YOU WANT TO MAKE FRIENDS IN BRITAIN YOU HAD BETTER LIKE BARS...

People in India and the UAE are the most likely to value a best friend being intelligent and cultured with 33% of them citing those qualities as the most important in a best friend. They're not just talking the talk, as they are also the two regions most likely to say that their most frequent activity to do with their friends is visiting museums and galleries.

People in the UK, on the other hand, are not so fussed with having a cultured pal. Of all the markets they were the least interested in this quality, with only 16% saying that it mattered. The Brits are the most likely to want to hit a bar or club with their best friends, with 43% calling that as their most frequent friend activity, compared with an average of 25% for the rest of the world.



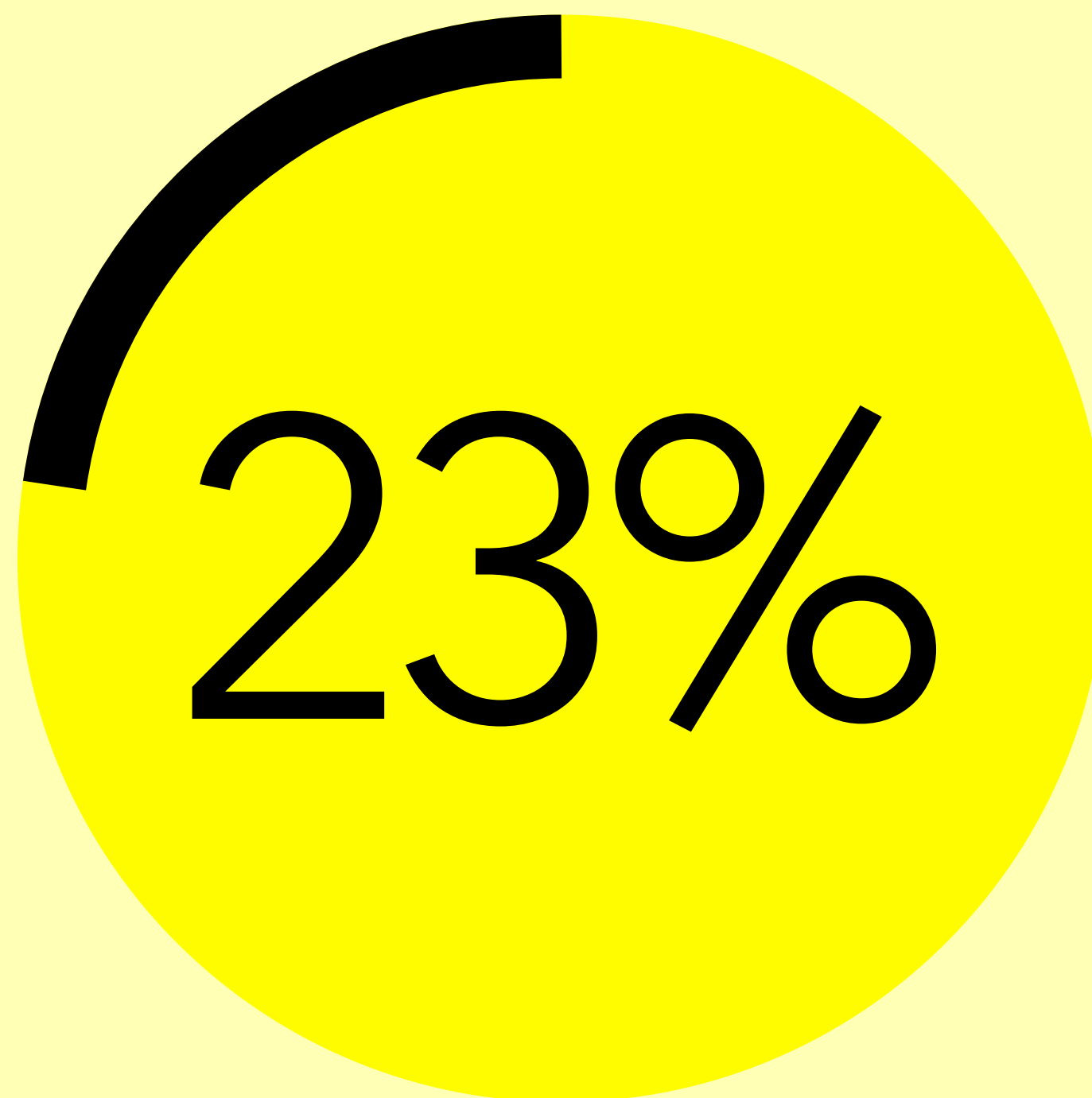
**ANSWERED BAR/CLUB AS MOST FREQUENT FRIEND ACTIVITY IN THE UK, COMPARED WITH**



**FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD**

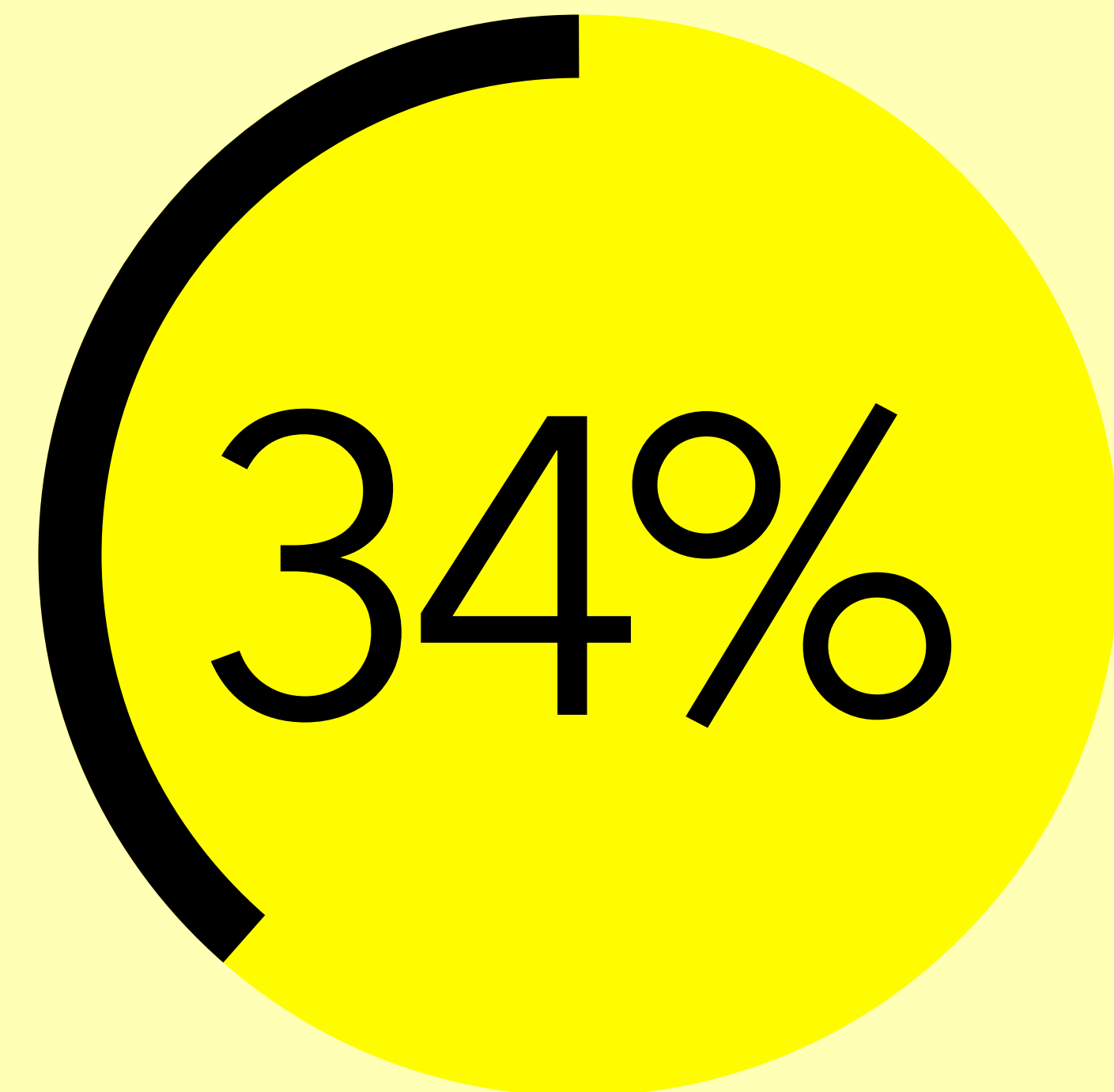
## IN GERMANY, IT IS ALL ABOUT WHO YOU KNOW...

Germany is the market where people are the most likely to make best friends via their existing pals, with 23% citing this method versus an average of 15% for the rest of the world.



IN GERMANY CITE MAKING BEST FRIENDS THROUGH EXISTING FRIENDS

It's Boomers in Germany that add a spike to these numbers with 34% of them saying that this is their number one way of making a best friend.



BOOMERS IN GERMANY SAY THAT IT IS THEIR NUMBER ONE WAY OF MAKING A BEST FRIEND



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Credit: Oli Kristen, Germany

# THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNICATION



# FRIENDS, THE FAMILY YOU PICK—

Younger generations are increasingly relying on friendships for happiness and love

However they come about, and whatever form they take around the world, friendships are entirely different from our relationships with our colleagues, our families, and our partners. According to Miriam Kirmayer, “The big thing that differentiates friendships from other relationships is the fact that they’re voluntary.”

She explains that, “Unlike our relationships with our family, partners, and children, there is not the outright expectation with our friends that we have to stay involved in each other’s lives. We continuously need to choose to invest in our friendships, to remain involved in each other’s lives—to show up. It’s an ongoing implicit choice that makes our friendships so hugely impactful for our sense of happiness and our self-esteem. This is because we see that our friends are showing up and that they’re invested in our lives, even though they don’t have to be.” The voluntary nature of our friendships is what makes them so important to us.



# LIFT ME UP

UK photographer Antonio Olmos captures a series of portraits of subjects before and after speaking to their friends.

2019







Credit: Oli Kristen, Germany

Our data shows that interacting with friends, whether in person or online, leaves us feeling overwhelmingly positive emotions: “happy”, “loved”, and “supported” are the three most reported. Interesting differences emerge when we look at the generational breakdown of our data. Boomers come away happiest from interacting with friends online. They share the top spot for reporting “happy” as the most common emotion they experience, along with Millennials at 40%.

“Friendships have become more important during the past 30 years,” says Wolfgang Kruger, a German psychotherapist and author of *The Difficult Luck of Friendship*. “Family ties are loosening more and more, and we seek support from friends rather than parents, siblings, and other relatives.” All four generations reported feeling supported through their interactions with friends both online and offline.<sup>6</sup> It’s clear that while friendships make Boomers feel happy and supported, they don’t feel as loved as younger generations do. Only 33% of Boomers feel “loved” after being with friends IRL compared to nearly 50% of Millennials and 45% of Gen Z. While 33% of Millennials and Gen Z feel loved after interacting with friends online, and

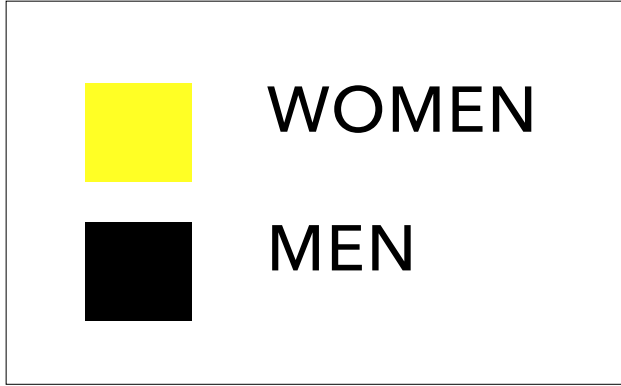
29% of Gen X feel the same, only 18% of Boomers experience that deeper emotion from an online interaction. Boomers experience the least negative emotion—only 3% report feeling overwhelmed, contrasted with 8% of Millennials. Only 2% of Boomers felt anxious after hanging out with friends online, compared with 7% of Gen Z.

Kate Leaver says she’s not surprised that younger generations report strong feelings from interacting online, as it is a crucial space for finding and nurturing friendships. “I spoke to people who found and made their most important friends online. I met someone who met all three of their bridesmaids online. She found that being online was a way for her to open up and grow these amazing relationships via DM.” She thinks that, “Boomers are less dependent on being online, and their usage is shallower and a little more detached, in a way which is unimaginable for Millennials and Z.”

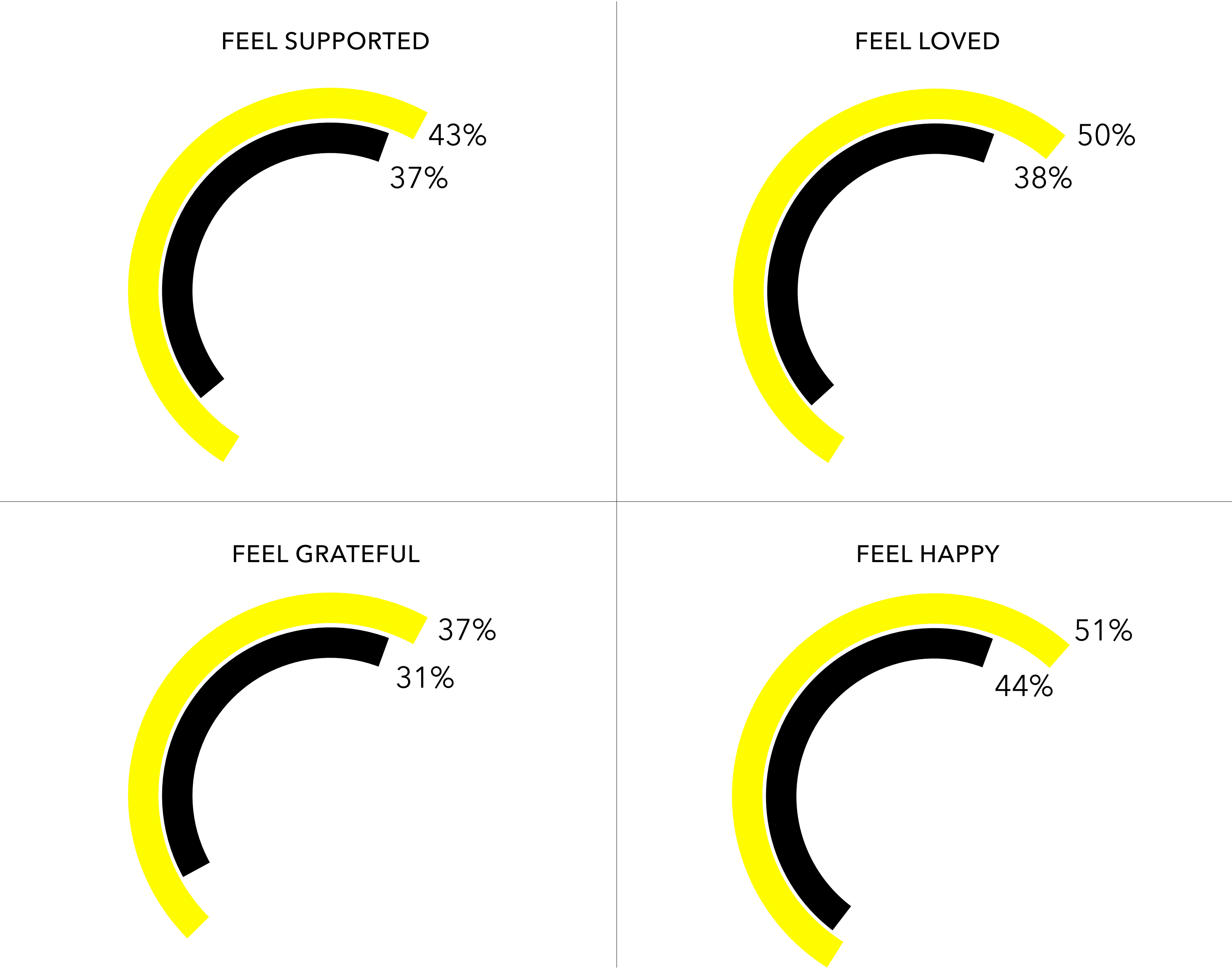
6  
Boomers 33%; Gen X 34%;  
Millennials 37%; Gen Z 36%



We also discovered that men and women felt similar emotions from hanging out with friends online. Men were slightly more likely to feel validated and inspired than women. But when looking at how they felt after interacting in person, women clocked higher percentages on the feels scale:



WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON EMOTIONS YOU EXPERIENCE AFTER INTERACTING WITH YOUR BEST FRIENDS?



# A FRIEND IN NEED—

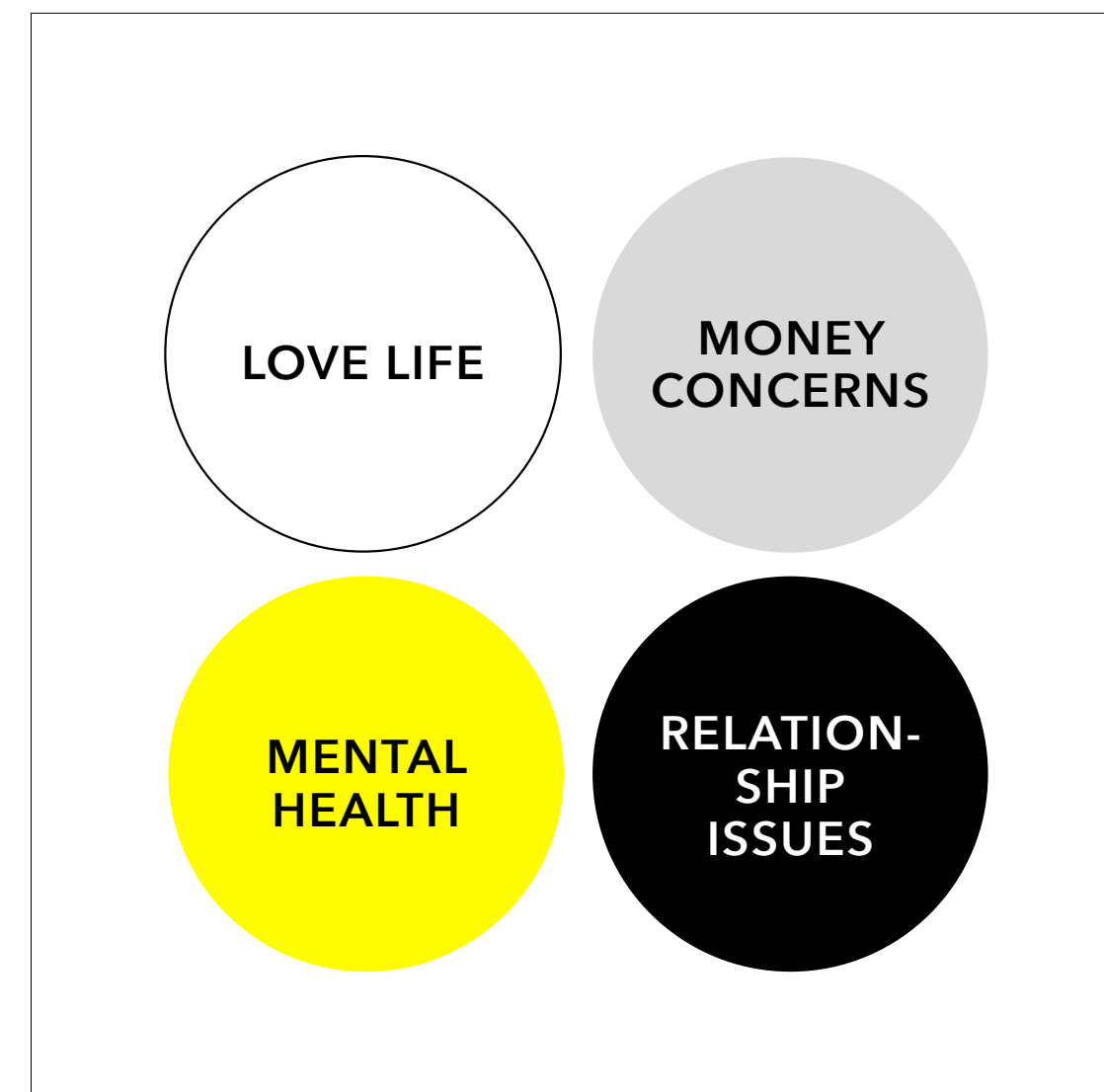
Friendship is a kind of therapy,  
but a few strong friendships are  
better than many weak ones

Both our data and our experts are emphatic about the importance of friendship. According to Bill Rawlins, “Friendship is a source of joy. Friends have fun.” The other side of friendship is the more profound aspect that involves getting to know someone and being with them through thick and thin.

Professor Thomas Dixon puts it this way: “Friendship means being able to share secret things with someone you can completely trust. It’s about providing a kind of therapy and getting the same in return.”

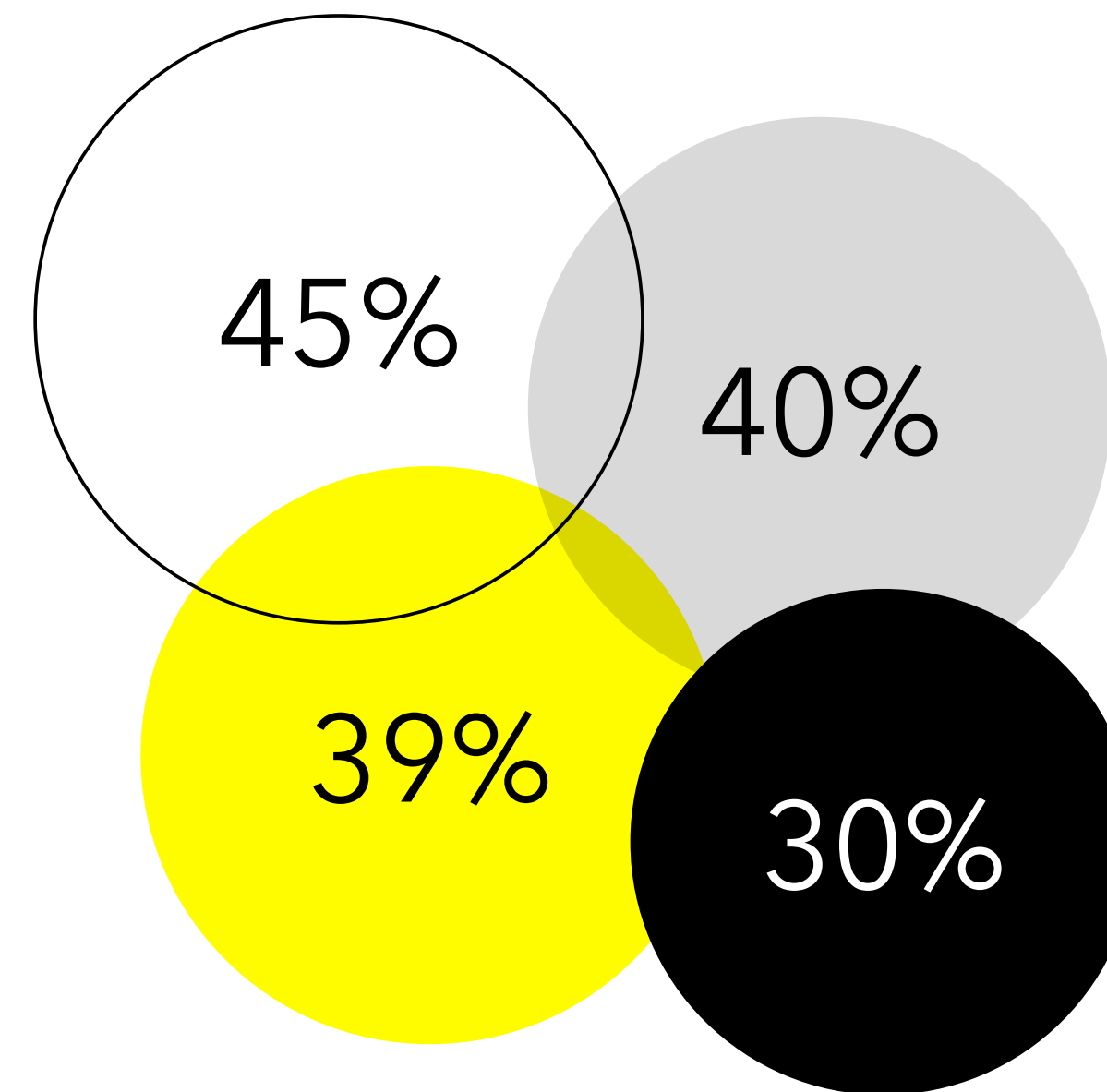
Nearly half of our respondents said that one of the most important qualities to have in a best friend is that they can provide emotional support “during times when I am feeling down.” Although this matters nearly equally to Boomers as it does to the other generations, Boomers are extremely buttoned up when it comes to the types of things they would or wouldn’t talk about with their bestie:<sup>7</sup>

**“WOULD NOT SHARE THIS TOPIC WITH MY BEST FRIEND”**

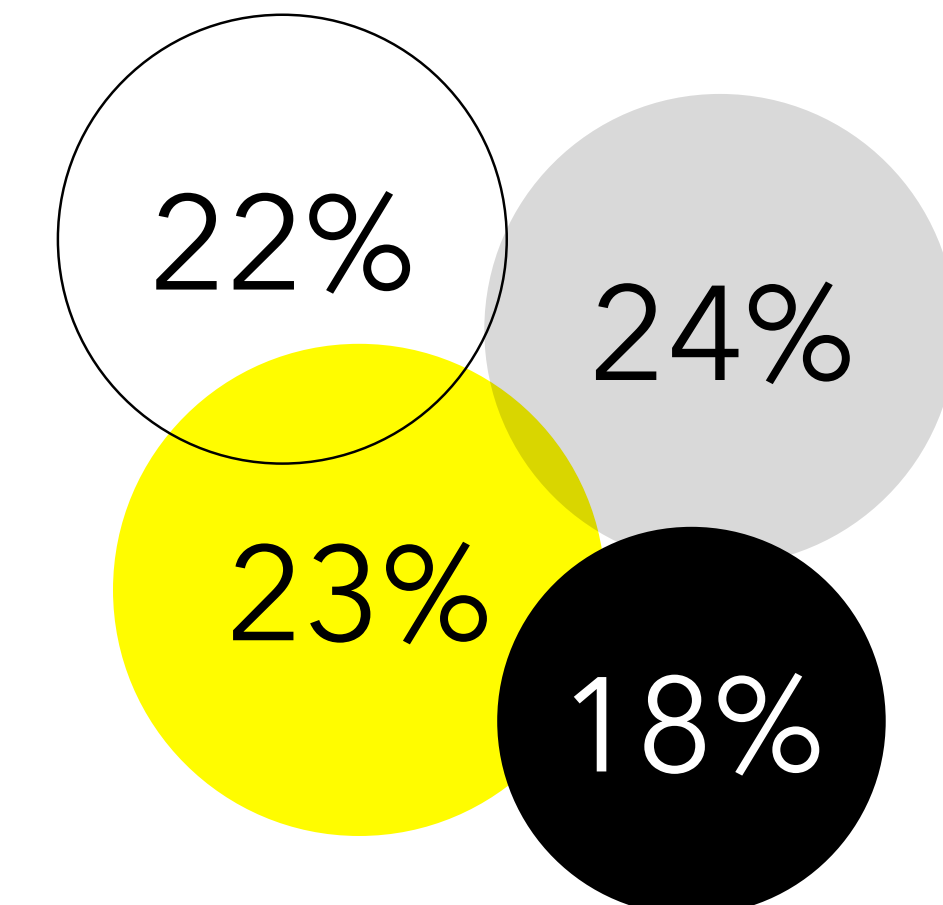


<sup>7</sup>  
“Provide emotional support during times when I am feeling down” as the most important quality to have in a best friend:  
Gen Z: 47%  
Gen Y: 46%  
Gen X: 43%

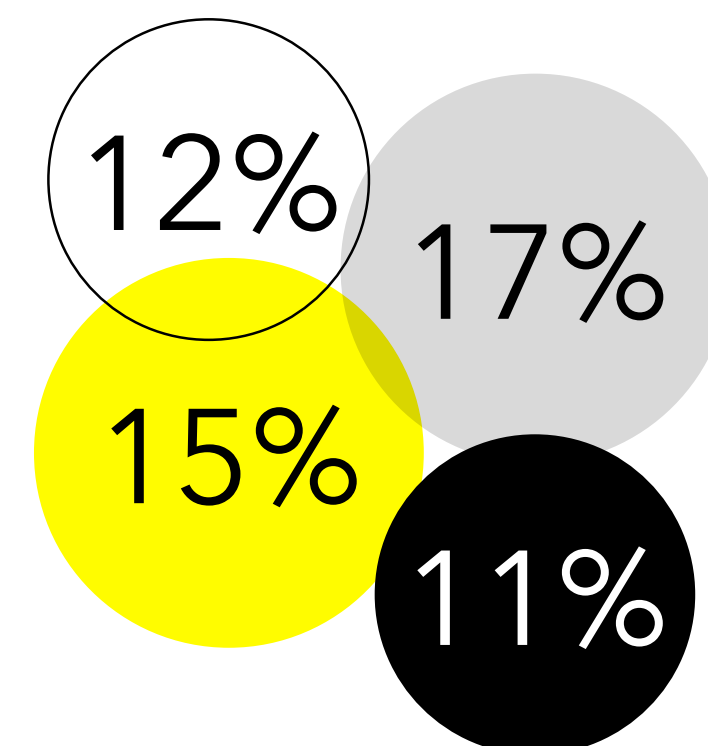
**BOOMERS**



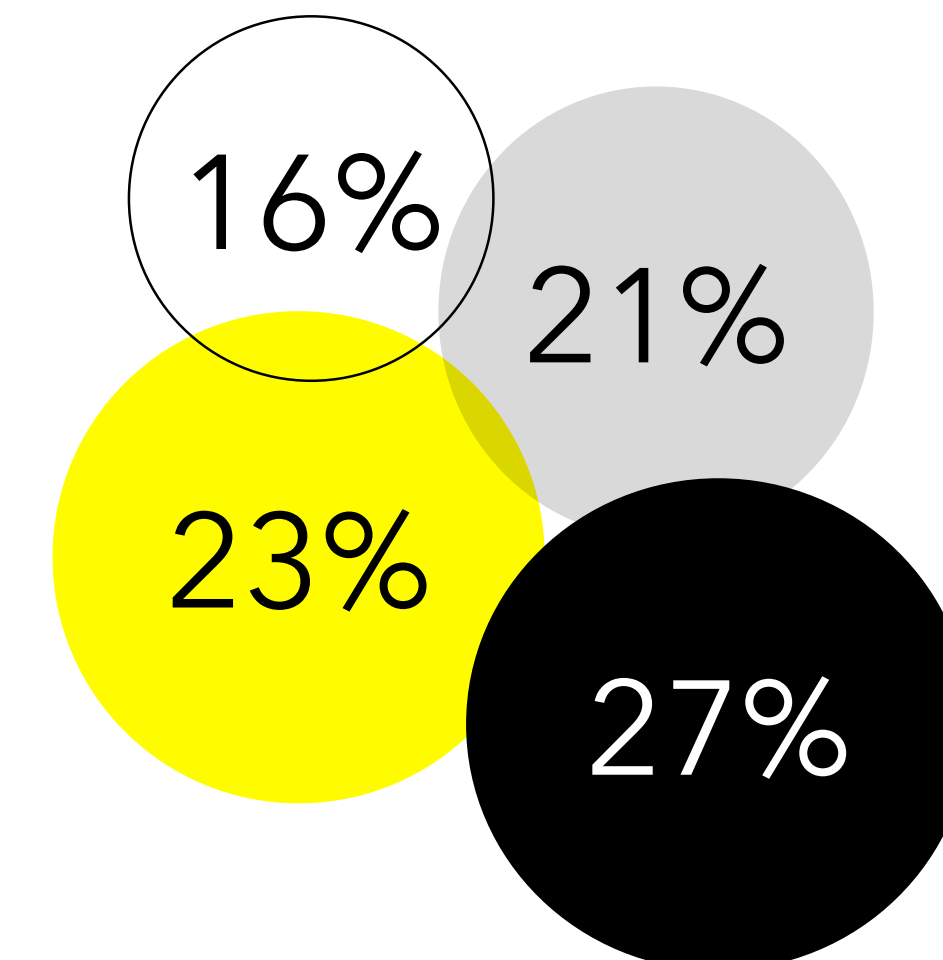
**GEN X**



**MILLENNIALS**



**GEN Z**







Credit: Anurag Banerjee, India

Wolfgang Kruger tells us that, “Sharing gives us the feeling of being deeply understood and therefore not being alone, this is vital as loneliness is one of the main reasons for psychological problems.” He believes that friendship can be an answer to loneliness in a way that doesn’t limit or restrict us in the way families and partnerships can. So why are Boomers less willing to share the intimate details of their lives with their friends?

According to Amit Desai, the answer might be in the social role that romantic partnerships have conventionally played for the Boomer generation. “In the UK there was a ‘nuclear family’ mentality which would pervade amongst Boomers and the remaining Silent Generation before them. Your household was a self-contained society with a husband and wife that would share everything within that unit, and nothing of note was to be shared outside of it. Pleasantries and chit chat could be exchanged with friends, but nothing more meaningful or personal.

The stigma around unburdening yourself on someone else may also account for the Boomer generation’s reluctance to share. Miriam Kirmayer explains that, “There is a feeling that talking about this kind of thing

isn’t appropriate and makes you a burden to your friend, and that you will drain them by talking about personal issues.” She also points out that, “It may not even be a case of holding back, some people just don’t see their friends as people to share this kind of information with—it doesn’t even cross their minds.” This may explain the Boomer generation’s reticence to talk as openly with their friends. To younger generations who are used to more informality, sharing, and openness, this is likely to seem alien.



Generational data aside, our work shows that one in ten people don't have a best friend at all. And of this unique group, one in five say that they have no interest in having friends at all. Miriam Kirmayer believes that it is both disingenuous and concerning that these people say that they don't need friends. She says, "While we all differ in terms of our need for social connection, what matters more than the number of friends we have is our subjective experience of feeling supported. One of the things I see in my work as a therapist is how easy it can be to convince ourselves that we don't need something we feel is missing. It can be so difficult to sit with the discomfort, loneliness, and shame that comes with feeling like we don't have enough friends or social connections.

For some people, instead of tolerating this discomfort or using it as motivation to seek out new connections and strengthen existing ones, they react by putting up walls and convincing themselves that they don't need friends. This behavior can be dangerous because it invalidates our universal need for genuine human connection."

Wolfgang Kruger agrees, stating, "People who have very few or zero friends tend to suffer from anxiety, depression, and are sick more often. Long term studies have shown that their life span is decreased by 20%. These people are less happy because happiness is mainly based on the steady foundation of friendship." Trying to make as many friends as possible may not be the answer either, and it may even be prohibitive. We found that between the ages of 13-19 having six or more best friends can be just as isolating as having none. Those with six or more best friends felt less able to talk about their frustrations regarding their family and friends than those with zero best friends. Of those people with six or more best friends, 63% said that the number of best friends they had inhibited them from developing a close relationship with one best friend, compared with only 40% of people with one to three best friends.

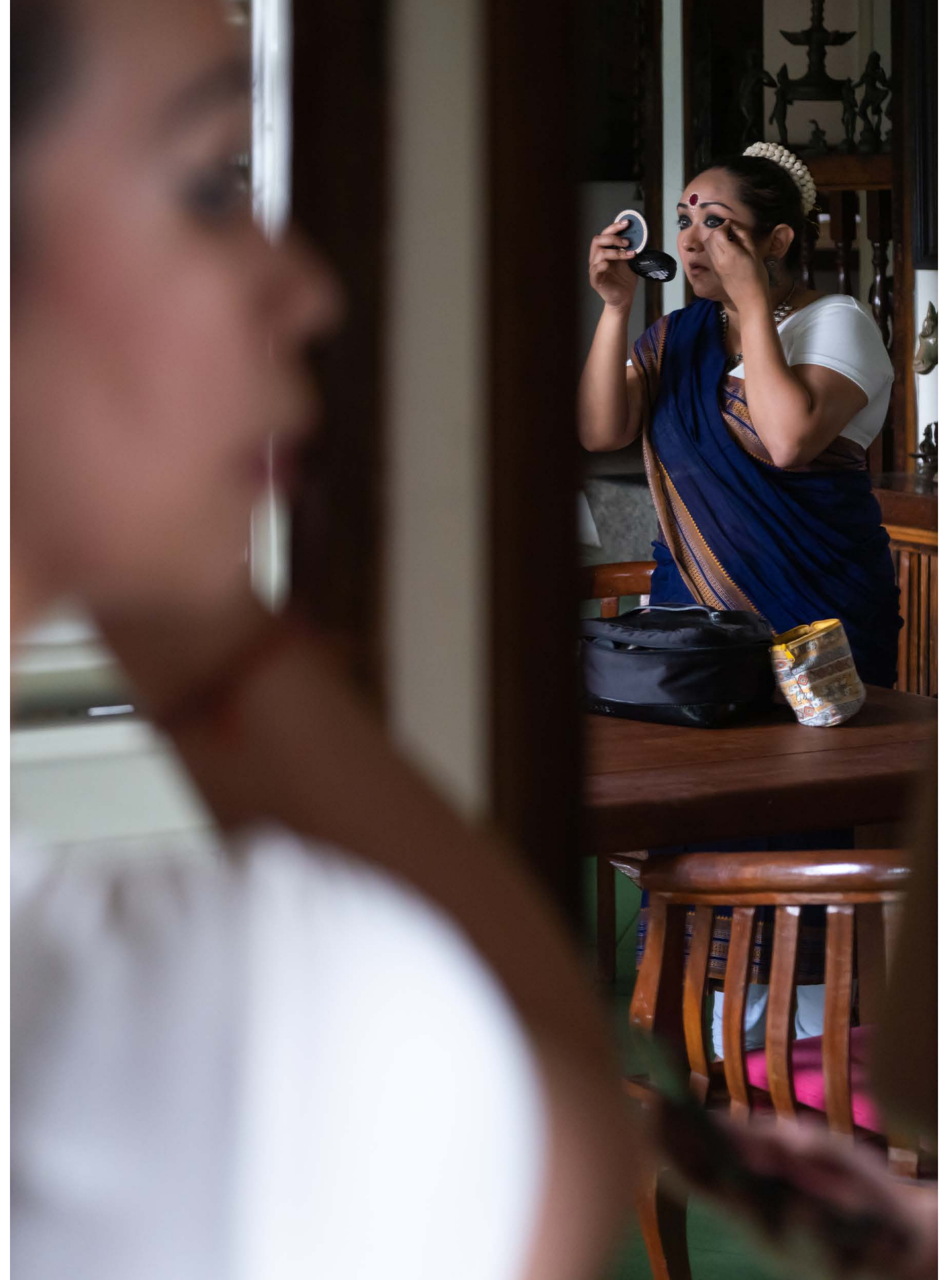




# 20 TO LIFE

Our research shows that the average age people meet their best friend is 21. Photographer Suzanne Lee captured two friends in Malaysia who exemplify this.

Nishah (36) and Mei Mei (40) have been best friends since they were 19 and 22 respectively, and continue to be inseparable today. They first met in their classical dance school, and have both risen to become teachers at the school and perform together in international dance tours. Nishah is now married and has a son with special medical needs. Mei Mei provides emotional support through this, while their connection through dance remains a bedrock in their lives as friends.







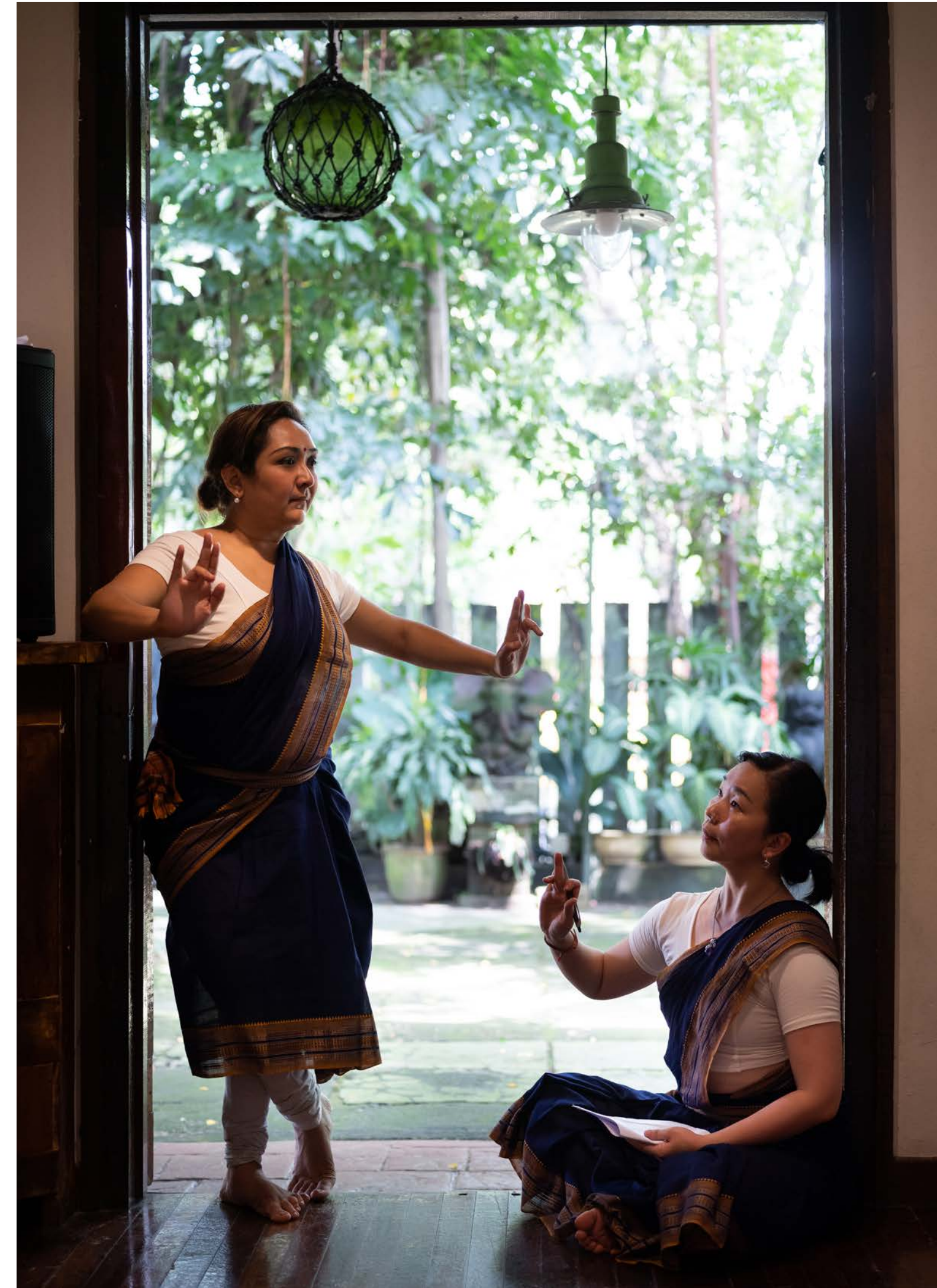
Credit: Suzanne Lee, Malaysia

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Credit: Suzanne Lee, Malaysia







Credit: Suzanne Lee, Malaysia





# KEY VISUALS—

Talking face-to-face is the best way to resolve conflict, but emojis, videos, and even photos can help reduce misunderstanding online

Dana Kerford, author of *The Friendship Project* and a teacher who specializes in helping kids and teenagers with their friendships, has found that her students have high expectations of their friendships. To reduce this pressure, she talks them through her four rules of friendship:

1. No friendship is perfect
2. Every friendship is different
3. Trust and respect are the foundations of friendship
4. Friendships change and that's ok



**“By talking through conflict, you learn more about your friend, and trust and respect grows from the increased understanding of one another.”**

—DANA KERFORD

Having an understanding of these guidelines helps her students build stronger friendships based on forgiveness and flexibility. Dana believes that conflict—and more specifically conflict resolution—is the “secret sauce” to building a long-lasting or even life-long friendship. Dana’s teachings find a correlation with our study. Respondents cite dishonesty as the number one enemy of friendship.

Gen Z also cite some other frustrations with their friendships. They often highlighted their annoyance at best friends when they seem to be more interested in other friends, and when best friends, “have so many friends they don’t give our relationship enough attention.”<sup>8,9</sup> These feelings decrease rapidly as the generations get older and are likely the outcome of that particular age group, as well as the nature of larger friend groups at school and college.

When it comes to conflict resolution, Gen X and Boomers are adamant in ensuring that they resolve issues face-to-face, with 77% of Gen X and 82% of Boomers choosing real-life facetime.<sup>10</sup> The majority of Gen Z and Millennials also choose this as their preferred method, but they are twice as likely as the older generations to prefer to, “resolve an issue over text or

8  
Gen Z 12%, Millennials 9%, Gen X 6% Boomers 4%

9  
Gen Z 8%, Millennials 6%, Gen X 5%, Boomers 3%

10  
73% Millennials and 71% Gen Z

11  
Average 11% for Millennials & Gen Z vs. 5% for Boomers & Gen X

Credit: Oli Kristen, Germany







Credit: Anurag Banerjee, India

social media so that I can think carefully about what I want to say and take the time to think through my responses.”<sup>11</sup>

Dana encourages her students to use emojis to replace the missing body language and make sure that real feelings are understood. She explains, “There is a study that demonstrated that 93% of what we communicate to the world is non-verbal. A big part of this is facial expressions and body language. The other part of it is the tone and the nuances in how you say things. So only 7% is left to the words we speak.” As a result, Dana believes that text-only messages can be misinterpreted and accidentally reinforce a conflict.

Miriam Kirmayer agrees that it’s important to be thoughtful about how we resolve conflicts online, stating, “When it comes to navigating important friendship challenges or experiences, in-person interaction is preferable. However, for a variety of reasons, that’s not always possible. The trouble with online conversations is that a lot of subtlety gets lost, especially when it relates to emotion and intent. However, there’s some fascinating research coming out showing that we can use emojis and

punctuation to our advantage to facilitate closeness, strengthen our message, and minimize misunderstandings.<sup>12</sup> Emojis can convey emotions, non-verbal behaviors, and even a sense of collaboration or solidarity.”

**“It’s about communicating with intent. It’s about feeling connected in a meaningful way. It’s not about frequency or necessarily medium, but about the feeling of being appreciated and seen for who we really are.”**

—MIRIAM KIRMAYER



For Gen Z and Millennials, video and photos have become a powerful way to strengthen visual communication and keep intentions clear. In both groups, 61% believe that video and photos help them to express what they want to say in a way that they can't with words. Explaining how useful this is, Miriam states, "Any medium that allows us to share both verbal and non-verbal behavior, like video, can help us to feel closer and more connected and to navigate relationship challenges with clarity."

Unsurprisingly, video and photos also help friends to express themselves when they don't share a native language. In India, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, 24% of people state that communicating through the camera reduces language barriers. We found that India, Malaysia, and the UAE were the regions least likely to say they grew up speaking the same language as all of their friends.

Regardless of language differences, an average of 56% of people from all countries love sending video and photos because it helps them to say what they can't with words. Using video and photos can also be more efficient.

Australia and France topped the list for appreciating being able to communicate quickly without typing.

Several of our experts point out that the use of text messaging and social media is stereotypically blamed as the cause of poor communication between people, and human behavior is often the driver of conflict avoidance. "Just because you have face-to-face interaction, that doesn't necessarily mean you're communicating honestly and with meaning," says Kate Leaver, "and just because you're interacting online doesn't mean it's superficial, but whatever happens, you need to be engaged."

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<http://lms.cit.cyut.edu.tw/sysdata/55/12655/doc/DCF5F7B9181A40B0/attach/366176.pdf>  
<https://academic.oup.com/jcmc/article/19/4/780/4067523>

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Credit: Oli Kristen, Germany





Credit: Anurag Banerjee, India

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**MILLENNIALS  
& GEN Z:  
SAME SAME  
BUT VERY  
DIFFERENT**



# THE END OF OVER-SHARING—

How Gen Z are reclaiming their autonomy online via private sharing

Throughout the research, Millennials come out on top as the most share-happy of the generations. Millennials are the least likely to say “I wouldn’t share that,” and they have the highest likelihood to share every topic we listed. Millennials will share issues publicly via platforms like Instagram or Facebook more than any other generation, but this is a trend that Gen Z doesn’t appear to be following. In fact, the numbers show that Gen Z is sharing less so we talked with some experts about what’s behind this generational shift.<sup>13</sup>

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Global “Would not share this topic with my best friend”  
Love life      Boomers: 45%    Gen X: 22%    Millennials: 12%    Gen Z: 16%  
Mental health    Boomers: 40%    Gen X: 24%    Millennials: 17%    Gen Z: 21%  
Money concerns    Boomers: 39%    Gen X: 23%    Millennials: 15%    Gen Z: 23%  
Relationship issues    Boomers: 30%    Gen X: 18%    Millennials: 11%    Gen Z: 27%



Lillian Ahenkan, an Australian Gen Z and expert in millennials and happiness, explains, “I would think that while they might be sharing less, the bigger part of the story might be that they’re just keeping it under wraps.”

She finds that millennials make, “dramatic performative announcements about ‘leaving social media’ or quitting the internet, but Gen Z doesn’t think about ‘opting out’ because it’s all they’ve ever known. For Gen Z, social media and messaging apps are a legitimate extension of themselves.”

Gen Z’s familiarity with these platforms means that they carefully choose how and where they share. According to Lillian, “They are reclaiming their autonomy online via private sharing—that’s where they’re really raw and open with each other.” And can you blame them? Gen Z has seen the full consequences of what can happen when you share your entire self online and people on the internet decide they don’t like it.

Chloe Combi, journalist and author of *Generation Z: Their Voices, Their Lives* agrees, “Gen Z is much more careful and thoughtful about what they say. There is a fear of misstating something and being pounced on.”



Credit: Oli Kristen, Germany



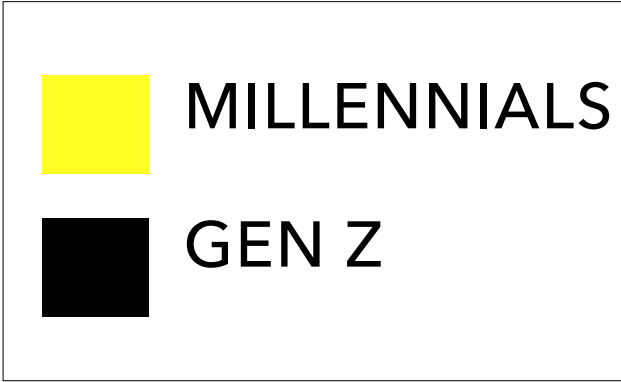
# FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE—

Millennials prefer fast responding and networked friends, but Gen Z wants intimate friendships with fewer people

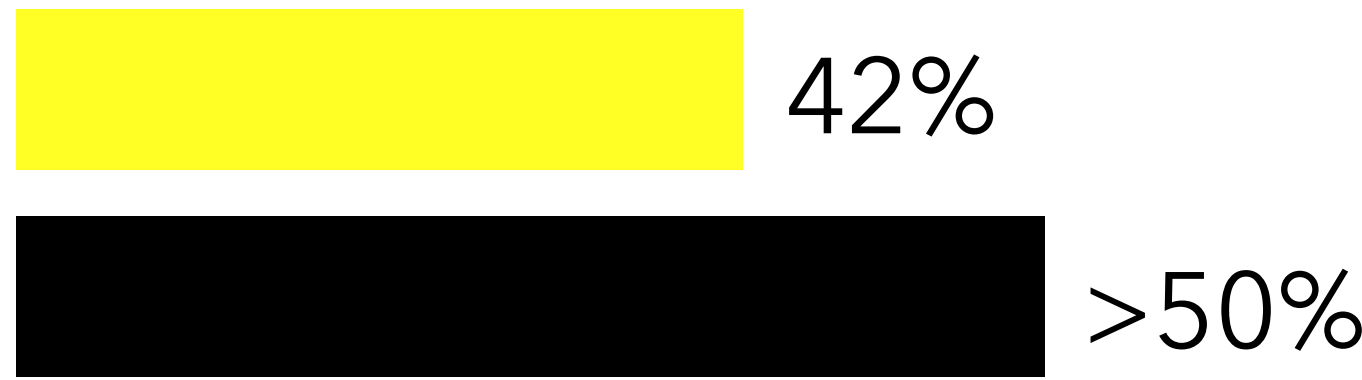
Gen Z is sharing less publicly than Millennials, and they are also forming friendships in different ways. Gen Z is looking to get closer to a smaller group of friends. Chloe Combi tells us, “What you have to understand is that millennials are the Facebook and MySpace generation. Their connection to the emergence of social media was with those platforms, and those platforms are all about networks. It was exhilarating for them to be able to spread out far and connect with this vast network of people via their immediate circle,” and that by contrast, you can learn a lot about Gen Z by the apps they focus on, “If you think about Snapchat or TikTok, they’re not about a vast network, they’re more about you and what you want to focus on.”

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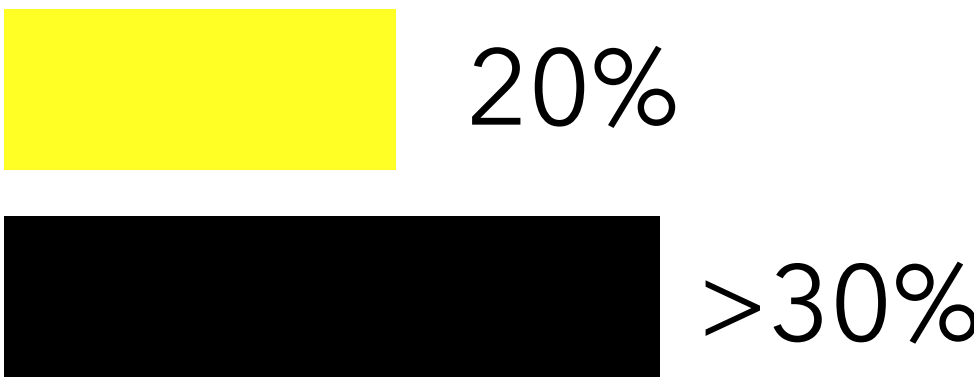




TALK TO FRIENDS DAILY ON SNAPCHAT



USE SNAPCHAT A FEW TIMES A DAY



COMMUNICATE WITH FRIENDS DAILY OVER FACEBOOK



CHECK IN ON FACEBOOK A FEW TIMES A DAY





Online communication platform choices can create differences between large friendship groups, and smaller deeper ones.

We see that when it comes to the average number of types of friends, users of more public platforms tend to have larger groups of connections, but less true friends than those who prefer private communication platforms. Snapchat users have the highest number of 'best friends' and 'close friends', and the fewest number of 'acquaintances'; while Facebook users have the fewest number of 'best friends'; and Instagram users have the highest number of 'acquaintances.'<sup>14</sup>

Chloe believes that the difference in social media and messaging apps use between Millennials and Gen Z is down to intimacy. Gen Z is actively seeking intimacy in their friendships, and wants their relationships to be open and honest more than any other generation. Gen Z is closer to the older Gen X in wanting "a few deep relationships." In contrast, Millennials are more likely to want a best friend who replies quickly and has an extensive social network. Millennials are also more likely to want "as many friends as possible" than any other generation.

Lillian Ahenkan believes that Gen Z might be onto something and thinks that friendship comes down to a simple question: how much are you willing to give to the ones that really mean something to you? She notes that, "For the friends you genuinely love, you think 'how can I amplify them, how can I make their lives better?'" And we can't do that for a lot of people." Lillian's explanation relates to the famous "Dunbar Number." Robin Dunbar is an evolutionary psychologist who says that we do not have the cognitive capacity to socialize, bond with, and remember the past interactions of more than 150 people. Kate Leaver expands stating, "Dunbar says that the core group of intimate friends is about

five. More than that isn't practical. It requires investment in time and emotional energy."

Miriam Kirmayer agrees saying, "It's not possible to cultivate an endless number of meaningful friendships. To get close with someone you have to be vulnerable, and that takes its toll if too many people demand it. The larger a group gets, the greater the pressure to open up to people around you and invest in those relationships. We can burn out when the expectations from too many people get too high." It looks as though this is a life lesson that Gen Z has already learned.

14  
Types of friends averages for Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook (global as well for reference):

GLOBAL  
Best friends: 4.3  
Good friends: 7.2  
Acquaintances: 20.4

SNAPCHAT  
Best friends: 5.1  
Good friends: 8.2  
Acquaintances: 20.5

INSTAGRAM  
Best friends: 4.7  
Good friends: 7.7  
Acquaintances: 21.1

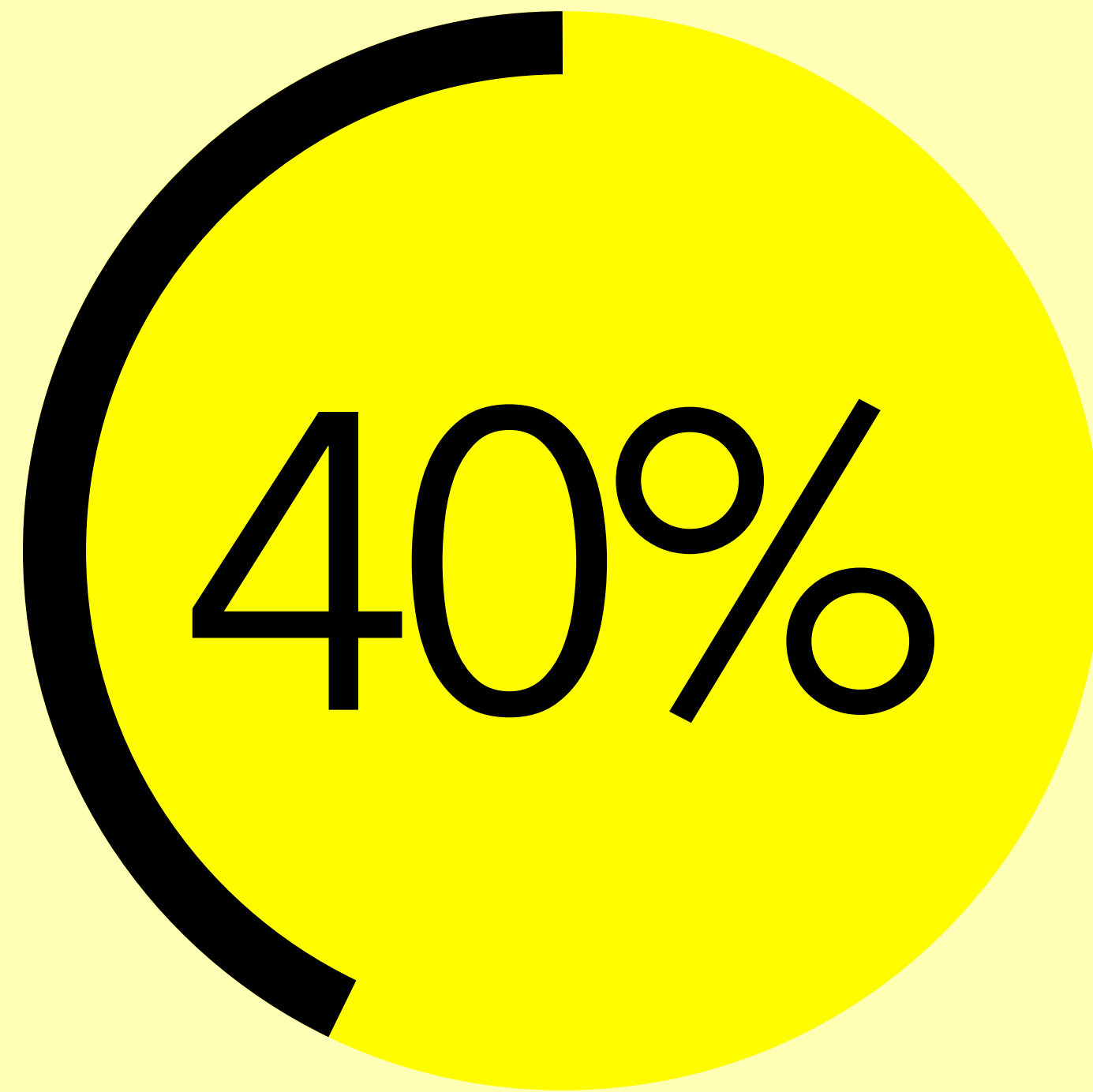
FACEBOOK  
Best friends: 4.3  
Good friends: 7.2  
Acquaintances: 20.6



Credit: Oli Kristen, Germany



## WE ARE LEGIT IN LOVE WITH OUR FRIENDS



GEN Y & Z COME AWAY FROM INTERACTING  
WITH FRIENDS FEELING 'LOVED'<sup>15</sup>

"There is a romantic element to the platonic friends; there can be a crush when you meet someone amazing, it's almost like falling in love."

—PROFESSOR THOMAS DIXON

"Friendships amongst younger generations are intense and intimate, in some cases they seem to be replacing the traditional romantic relationships; you see they treat friends almost like a quasi-partner."

—CHLOE COMBI

"In a way, really healthy friendship looks a lot like a good marriage; you see someone for who they genuinely are, and you stand by them."

— LILLIAN AHENKAN

<sup>15</sup>

What are the most common emotions you experience after interacting with your best friends?—LOVED

Interacting with a BF online:

Gen Z 32%; Millennials 35%; Gen X 29%; Baby Boomers 18%

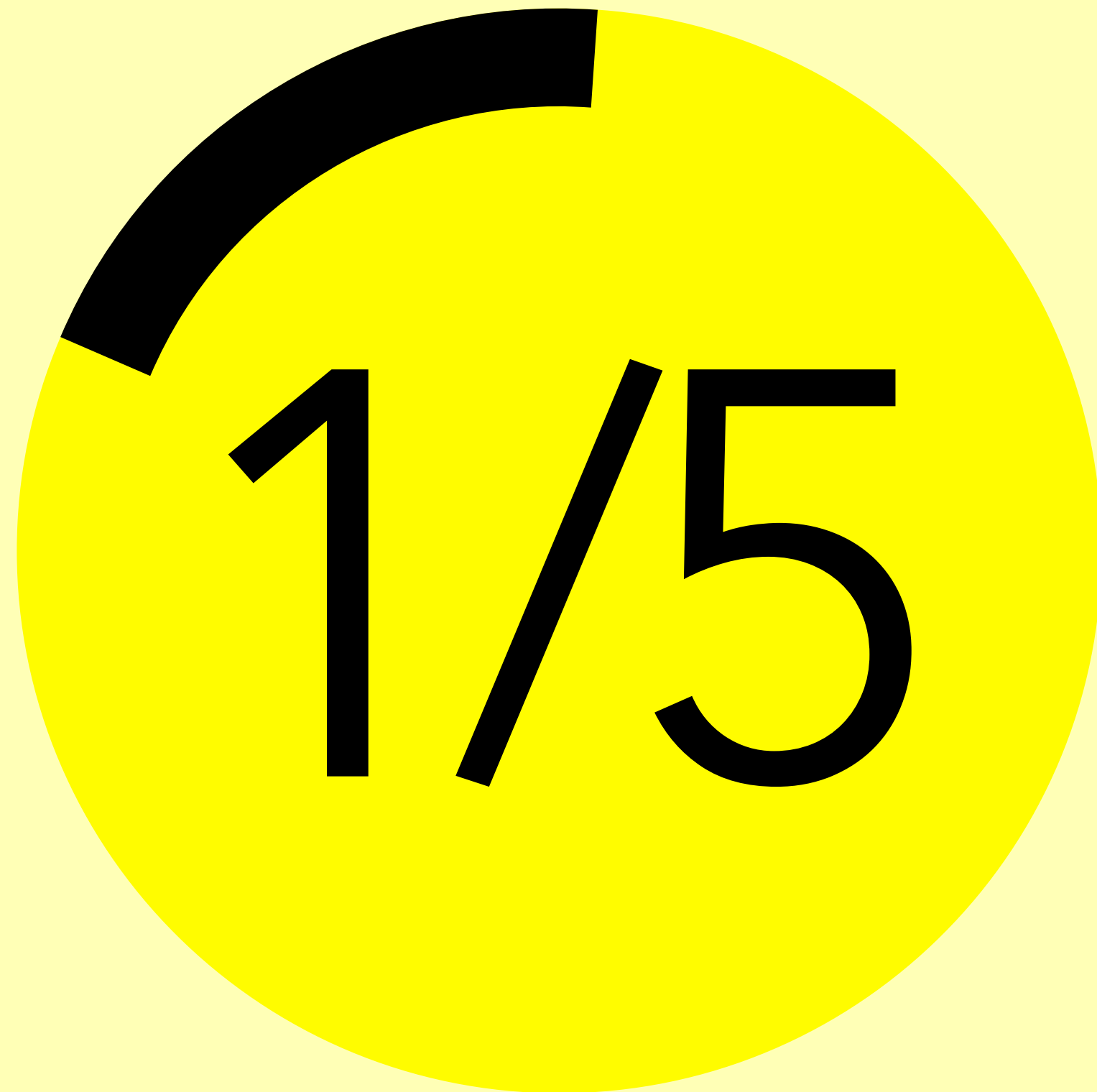
Interacting with a BF in person:

Gen Z 45%; Millennials 49%; Gen X 41%; Baby Boomers 33%



# AND IT CAN BE LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

**GEN Z IS THE READIEST TO  
FALL FAST FOR A FRIEND.  
NEARLY**



**SAID THEY ONLY NEEDED A MONTH  
TO DECIDE IF SOMEONE  
WAS THEIR BEST FRIEND<sup>16</sup>**

“We’ve all heard of love at first sight, but there is research by Kelly Campbell and colleagues to suggest that friendship at first sight (otherwise known as “friendship chemistry”) is a real experience for some. An immediate connection or spark is often the result of shared interests, values, or experiences and personal characteristics like openness. There are few things as exciting as meeting someone new and leaving a conversation as fast friends. That said, I caution against getting too caught up in this narrative. Just because you don’t experience immediate chemistry with someone new does not mean that you can’t go on to experience a close, meaningful friendship. For most people, it takes time and repeated interactions to build the trust, understanding, and shared history that characterize close friendships.”<sup>17</sup>

—Miriam Kirmayer

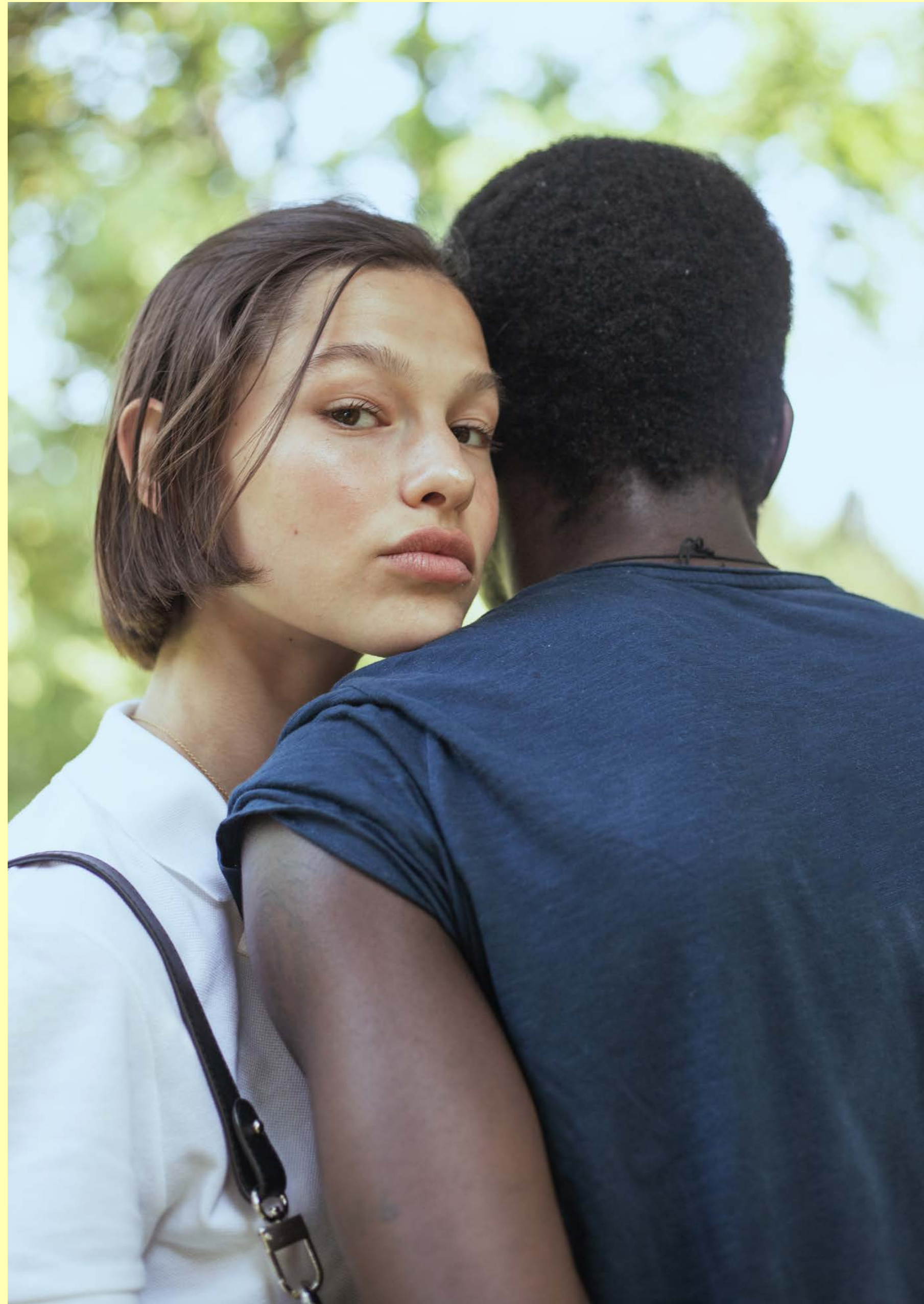


<sup>16</sup>  
When asked about what’s the minimum amount of time you know someone before they are your best friend:  
–21% of Gen Z said one month  
–15% of Millennials said one month  
–12% of Gen X said one month  
–12% of Baby Boomers said one month

<sup>17</sup>  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/sites/default/files/Friendship%20Chemistry.pdf>  
<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/cgi/viewcontent>.



HOWEVER WE LOVE OUR FRIENDS,  
OUR FRIENDSHIPS MAKE OUR  
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS  
STRONGER



“First of all it is a fact that romantic relationships are much better if we also maintain good friendships. Lovers with good friendships are less dependent and don’t develop too high expectations. They do not want to share every single thing in life, which always puts too much of a burden on a love relationship.”

—WOLFGANG KRUGER

“Not only are friends vital because people are getting married later, so we need the support of our friends for longer, but friendships are crucial to the health of romantic relationships.”

—MIRIAM KIRMAYER



## PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

### Antonio Olmos, UK

Our data shows that interacting with friends, whether in person or online, leaves us feeling overwhelmingly positive emotions. According to our research, feeling happy, loved, and supported are the three most reported emotions. To examine this, London, UK based photographer Antonio Olmos captured a series of portraits of subjects before and after interacting with their friends.

### Suzanne Lee, Malaysia

Our research shows that the average age people meet their best friend is 21. Photographer Suzanne Lee captured two friends in Malaysia who exemplify this. Nishah (36) and Mei Mei (40) have been best friends since they were 19 and 22 respectively, and continue to be inseparable today. They first met in their classical dance school, and have both risen to become teachers at the school and perform together in international dance tours. Nishah is now married and has a son with special medical needs. Mei Mei provides emotional support through this, while their connection through dance remains a bedrock in their lives as friends.

### Anurag Banerjee, India

Bombay, India based photographer Anurag Banerjee spent time with pairs of friends spanning each generation—Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers—to explore what friendship means to them, how it's expressed and the spaces it occupies around the city.

### Oli Kristen, Germany

Berlin, Germany based photographer Oli Kristen sees diversity as a strong link to friendship in his group of friends, as well as in his generation. He captures the the beauty of variety and influence from other cultures in his close circle of friends in his

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