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How These Relationships In Our Youth Impact Future Romantic Relationships

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I have about three girlfriends from high school who are like sisters to me. Our friendships back then were deep and intense and beautiful. We shared the most intimate secrets about our

feelings, our home lives, our budding love lives, and everything in between. We spent countless hours on the phone (this was before texting or social media!) and even more hours camped out at on each other's bedroom floors.

I saw one dear friend through a serious eating disorder, another through intense family strife, and another through endless relationship snafus. My friends saw me through the worst (and only!) breakup of my young life, as well as the dissolution of my relationship with my dad. I trusted these girls and they trusted me.

We saw each other for who we were and loved each and every part, even the broken ones. We were brought together at perhaps one of the most vulnerable and tumultuous times of a person's life. These are the kinds of friendship that teach you so much and help you blossom into the strong, resilient adult you will one day become.

Most of all, these are the friendships that endure. I remain close to these gals to this day, and though we don't talk nearly enough, once we connect, it's like no time has passed at all.

That's why I almost got teary-eyed when I came across a new study that looked at just how impactful these can teenage friendships can be. The study, **published in *Child Development*** found that the lessons you learn and the wisdom you glean from your teenage friendships actually carry into future relationships – especially your adult romantic relationships.

Pretty freaking intriguing and cool, huh?

The study aimed to examine what contributes to high quality, satisfying romantic relationships for adults in their 20s. As the

study researchers explain, past research has found that things like physical and mental health in adolescence influenced the quality of romantic relationships later in life. But this new study found that the most important factor was actually having strong friendships in your teens (the study looked specifically at same gender relationships).

Interestingly, it was not your previous teenage romantic relationships that had the most influence, as one might assume.

“In spite of the emphasis teens put on adolescent romantic relationships, they turn out not to be the most important predictor of future romantic success,” study leader Joseph P. Allen, professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, explained.

“Instead, it’s the skills learned in friendships with peers of the same gender—skills such as stability, assertiveness, intimacy, and social competence—that correspond most closely to the skills needed for success in adult romantic relationships,” he added.

That is totally fascinating to me. I mean, I knew my teen BFFs played a important role, but who would have thought those relationships would have had such an huge influence on my future lovers and partners? And yet, it makes total sense when you think about it.

In order to gather the data, researchers interviewed 165 adolescents from ages 13 to 30, gathered from a diverse population in the southeastern United States. As teens, the quality of their close friendships as well as romantic relationships were assessed. Then, when they were in their late

20s, the researchers interviewed them about their romantic lives.

The researchers found that there were some “key social developmental tasks” in the teen years that predicted successful and satisfying romantic relationships from ages 27 to 30. These included things like the propensity to be “appropriately assertive” with your peers, an ability to have several different kinds of friendships, as well as a capability to have close and stable friendships.

Again, it was the non-romantic relationships that seemed to have the greatest influence on adult romantic relationships – and that was true even if the teens were concurrently involved with romantic partners.

The researchers had an interesting theory about why this might be so.

“Romantic relationships in adolescence are much more likely to be fleeting, and as such, they don’t appear to be the main way teens learn skills needed for the future,” commented Rachel K. Narr, a doctoral student at the University of Virginia and co-author of the study.

I know that I am personally the exception here (**I actually ended up marrying my high school boyfriend!**). But for most of us, the relationships that endure after high school aren’t the guys and gals we dated. It’s those wonderful and rich friendships we cultivated – through those up-all-night sleepovers, notes slipped in lockers, and late-night phone calls where we bared our souls.

These relationships are more than friendships. Your high school

besties become your family ... for life. They teach you so much about how to be loyal, how to be a good listener and communicator, and even how to resolve conflicts (we all know **these friendships weren't always drama-free!**).

But most of all, they teach you how to love, and how to find “your people” – the ones you can trust with a secret, your sometimes very conflicted feelings, and your heart. They serve as the template for your future adult relationships – not just romantic relationships, but also other future friendships, professional relationships, and even parenting relationships.

Your high school BFFs are everything, aren't they? And that reminds me, I owe mine a much-needed catch-up phone call.

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