

# FRIENDS

## AT FIRST

## SIGHT?

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A RECENT STUDY ON FRIENDSHIP SAYS WE KNOW IF WE'RE GOING TO BE BFFS WITH SOMEONE WITHIN TEN SECONDS OF MEETING THEM. AND JUST LIKE WITH ROMANTIC LOVE, FRIENDSHIP IS ALL ABOUT CHEMISTRY...

If the hit US show *Girls* has taught us anything about female friendship, it's that platonic relationships can be just as deep and binding as romantic ones. Lena Dunham, the show's creator has said: "I think about my best friendship – which the Marnie-Hannah friendship in *Girls* is based on – as like a great romance of my young life." Meanwhile, actress Michelle Williams has also drawn parallels between her long-standing friendship with her former *Dawson's Creek* co-star Busy Phillips and romantic love. "I'm so in love with her," she has said. "She's proof that the love of your life does not have to be a man! That's the love of my life right there."

It's a theme that was recently explored in Rebecca Traister's best-selling book, *All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation*, which was recently optioned for US TV. Traister argues that the rising numbers of single women (there are now more single women living in America than married ones) has served to deepen the bonds of female friendships with many now outlasting romantic relationships. >

CAROLINE VREELAND AND  
SHEA MARIE SHOW US HOW BFFS  
DO STREET STYLE AT  
FASHION WEEK





What's more, as well as being just as meaningful and life-affirming as a romantic partnership, a platonic friendship can be just as inevitable. A recent study in *The Social Science Journal* says we can feel instantly drawn to and intrigued by a prospective new friend the same way we can a romantic partner.

Headed up by Kelly Campbell, a psychology professor at California State University, San Bernardino, the study examined 'friendship chemistry', which Campbell defined as "an instant connection between friends that is easy and makes the relationship seem natural." The study found that friendship chemistry was more likely to occur between women, which Campbell believes is a result of girls being socialised to trust their emotions more than boys from a young age. Women – and men with certain personality traits (agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness, for example) – are better able to tap into the emotional side of the brain that intuition and personal chemistry relies on, argues Campbell.

The findings back up a previous study in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, in which Michael Sunnafrank, a communications professor at the University of Minnesota, and his colleague Artemio Ramirez paired up college freshmen for introductory sessions. Researchers found that the pairs that positively sized each other up in the initial meeting were more likely to have stayed friends a few months later. "First encounters, impressions formed during those encounters, and the relational decisions therein have a strong and lasting influence on relationships," says the study.

"Much like romantic relationships, it is possible, in fact very common, to experience an instant connection in a platonic friendship," says Liz

Pryor, advice guru and author of a book on female friendship, *What Did I Do Wrong?* (Lizpryor.com). "First impressions are almost critical; it is that first chemistry that usually begins the desire to pursue the friendship." Pryor adds that we can instantly click with a new friend in the same way we can a romantic partner. "Emotionally, it's very near the same thing. Someone with whom you feel an instant camaraderie, or familiarity... Common life experiences, common ways of thinking, same sense of humor... Emotional chemistry can work the same platonically and romantically." Pryor adds: "More often than not, when two women meet, and the instant connection is there, there is no stopping it. Most of the time they will make the effort and the time to allow what feels so right in their gut to move to a place of friendship."

We've all spent time and energy trying to decipher if we have a romantic connection with someone, but figuring out if a potential new friend is into you can be just as tricky. Dr Tara Wyne, a clinical psychologist at Lighthouse Arabia, says the social cues that indicate someone feels a friendship connection can be nuanced. "A bid for connection can be non-verbal, such as a simple sigh or choosing to sit close to someone when you could easily sit elsewhere." Dr Wyne adds: "We glance at people in our environment and take in

immeasurable amounts of information about their expressions, energy, demeanour, body language, attractiveness, attentiveness, availability... If we see the other person is showing interest and are oriented to us in some way, looking open is welcoming or even just curious, it gives us the green light to expand the connection and make a bid. We are all looking for cues from others to signal that they are open to get to know us."

"PLATONIC RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE JUST AS DEEP AND BINDING AS ROMANTIC ONES"

THERE'S NEVER A SHORTAGE OF STYLISH BEES ON THE FASHION CIRCUIT



JANA RIDGE/GETTY IMAGES



MADMOISELLE YEMIA AND IZ UY



KENVILE TEBB AND JAY TEL SUDAN

IMAGES: GETTY

The good news, especially for expats new to the UAE and on the hunt for new friends, is that instant platonic connections are far more common than the elusive love-at-first-sight spark. "Forming an instant platonic connection happens more often than an instant romantic connection is formed," says Dr Ahuja. "When you have shared interests, a similar outlook and similar values, an instant connection can easily happen." However, turning that initial spark into a fully formed friendship is not so straightforward, argues Dr Ahuja. "Forming an

instant connection isn't the most difficult part; it is more difficult to keep that sense of connection going." In fact, much of friendship chemistry is self-fulfilling prophecy: if your gut tells you that you are going to be good friends with someone you make steps to make the friendship a reality. "Forming an instant connection is one thing, but if we don't follow it up, put in the energy and effort and nurture the relationship, the instant connection is going to fizzle," says Dr Ahuja. "The key is to maintain the relationships that are important to us; those that are worth it." ■