

Gen Z's Connections are Deeper Than You Might Think

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As a young person in this rapidly changing world, it's really hard not to feel lonely. This is compounded by my existence as a rural resident; every activity I plan is influenced by how much time it will take me to drive there, or how much internet bandwidth I'll eat up at home. On top of this, I work and go to college full-time, and I'm working in three concurrent internships. It's rare that I find time to truly connect to people, especially peers or people who live outside my house.

Given this, I've learned to value three things: connections based on smaller common interests than people might expect; connections that are not necessarily one-on-one; and activities I can do alone that make me feel fulfilled. I think Gen Z is making friendships more easily than older generations perhaps ever expected, but it might not look like it on the surface. Do I have any friends that go to dinner with me a couple times a month to talk about our lives and personal news since the last time we saw each other? No. I do, however, have a group of three friends who gather with me for twenty minutes every week to debate which food mascot out of all of them would win in a fight. I schedule catch-up calls with my best friend like three times a year. I get together with my best work friend twice a month to watch people play video games on YouTube using her internet instead of mine. I've heard Gen Z friendships criticized as shallow - but is it shallow if we keep up these habits of spending time and having fun together?

I also have found a great many communities which I love and never interact one-on-one within. Existing in various spheres of social media has become so integral to my connection-making that I actually set aside a dedicated half hour twice a week just to engage. I chat with folks who also have Tourette's or ADHD on their latest TikTok video or I get advice on how to navigate buying my own health insurance on Twitter lives. Even just engaging by myself and never saying or interacting with anything except to see it has been important in my journey of being less lonely. I have learned that there are other people in the world who feel the way I do about so many things, not only in community spaces that match my social spheres, but just young people in general; they know what it is to wake up sometimes and wonder if we'll recognize the earth or our society in a couple of years. My identities - genderfluid, autistic, fat, polyamorous, learning disabled - become a beautiful mirror against others' experiences and their willingness to share about them. In short - there is so much support for Gen Z in our remote and online spaces, and it's crucial that the trusted adults in our lives recognize and do not diminish the importance of this.

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