2026

# HOSTING AND GATHERING AMONG AMERICAN WOMEN: TRENDS AND BARRIERS

## 2026 Gathering Report

*Trends and barriers for women who host and gather*

Prepared by Dr. Roxanne Felig for the
Women's Relational Health Institute



WOMEN'S RELATIONAL HEALTH INSTITUTE

www.womensrelationalhealthinstitute.com

# Women's relational health is the domain of health that speaks to a woman's ability to *perceive, form, and maintain healthy platonic same-sex relationships over time.*

## About the Hosting and Gathering Report 2026

The goal of this report is to share a compilation of data that offers fresh insights into the current state of women's hosting and gathering trends.

The Women's Relational Health Institute explores the domain of health that comes from women's ability to maintain strong, same-sex platonic relationships.

One aspect of healthy friendship maintenance is quality time spent with others, so exploring women's hosting and gathering trends is a critical part of the conversation.

One of the key surveys included in this report is from The Women's Relational Health Institute and findings from its "Hosting and Gathering for American Women: Trends and Barriers Survey".

About the survey: 1,000 U.S. women were recruited through Prolific and surveyed online on October 9–10, 2026. The survey was run on behalf of the Women's Relational Health Institute.

## For more information

To learn more about the sources and processes used to construct this report, please contact The Women's Relational Health Institute at team@womensrelationalhealthinstitute.com.

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# Note from the Director

## Things are changing.

Until recently, the mention of "women's health" was limited to issues of pregnancy, menopause, and hormones. But today we're speaking about women's health more broadly, more holistically. We're rethinking all that truly makes a woman *well*.

The way a woman perceives, forms, and maintains relationships over time (relational health) will impact her body, her mind, and her overall life satisfaction.

And since **70% of a women's network is made up of other women,** it's worth taking the time to look at the ways that women uniquely communicate, cooperate, and engage in conflict so we can have quality relationships with one another.

Much of our friendship quality is determined by what happens when we come together, so we designed this survey to explore why women host (and why they avoid hosting) and what they want most when they connect with their women friends.

This report aims to shed light on these questions and provide helpful insights.

**Because it matters.**

General facts about women's relational health:

- The number one cause of death for women is heart disease, and having poor social connections increases your risk by nearly 30%. (Source)
- Women who are able to navigate healthy conflict have greater wellbeing and closer relationships. (Source)
- Women who seek the support of other women in response to emotional distress see a decrease in cortisol (the stress hormone). (Source)
- Women's "positive friend relations" predict better health 23 years later. (Source)

I outlined many of the benefits of women's relationships in the opening chapter of my book, *Fighting for our Friendships: The Science and Art of Conflict and Connection in Women's Relationships*, and it's been a joy to watch women have more intentional conversations around developing skills that will help them have more joyful platonic, same-sex connections.

# Note from the Director

cont'd.

Our "Hosting and Gathering for American Women: Trends and Barriers Survey" found a connection between close friendships and gathering habits:

***Women with more close friends tend to host and attend gatherings more than women without them.***

There is a connection between our social habits and our friendships.

While there are endless reasons to gather, we find a special emphasis on gathering during the holiday season. Our team decided to seek data that can be immediately helpful to those with gathering top of mind as 2026 comes to a close.

We hope that the information revealed in our Gathering Survey encourages women to say "yes" to gathering with friends, whether they're hosting or attending as a guest.

Thank you for taking the time to review this report. I encourage you to share this with your team, your supervisor, your sister, and your friends as we work together to form deeper connections with one another.

Sincerely,

*Danielle Bayard Jackson*

**Danielle Bayard Jackson**
Director, Women's Relational Health Institute



# What is Women's Relational Health?

*Women's relational health is the ability to perceive, form, and maintain healthy platonic relationships with other women.*

The Women's Relational Health Institute has a mission to help women improve the *beliefs, skills, and confidence* required to sustain high-quality relationships with other women. Our gender-specific focus is due to large bodies of research that continue to underscore the unique ways that women connect, communicate, and engage in conflict, and we believe that these factors influence a woman's ability to form meaningful platonic same-sex relationships.

Relational health is often addressed in the context of a child's formative relationships with a caregiver, and how these dynamics influence them over the course of their lifetime. But relational health is something that should be addressed in adulthood as our beliefs, experiences, circumstances, and obligations evolve over time.



## The Five Domains of Relational Health

The Five Domains of Relational Health is a framework designed by Danielle Bayard Jackson in partnership with the Women's Relational Health Institute. It includes:

**Mindset**: Before one can begin forming healthy platonic relationships, she needs to assess her beliefs about connection and unpack self-imposed limitations.

**Connection**: This domain involves one's skills and ability to form new platonic connections "from scratch".

**Momentum**: Happiness research from Harvard finds that the number one thing that determines our health and overall life satisfaction is the quality of our relationships– but how exactly do we enhance the quality of the connection in our lives? This domain requires women to examine their ability to create depth in existing relationships.

**Conflict**: The research tells us that people report feeling closer to one another after navigating healthy conflict together. But some women simply lack the skills necessary to be successful in this area... and their relationships are suffering because of it.

**Renewal**: This domain explores a woman's ability to recover when relationship dissolution occurs, and move forward with optimism and gratitude.

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When a woman's skills, attitudes, and beliefs in each of these domains are strong, she will see improved health and happiness.

## Want to see the full framework?

The Institute provides training and consulting on the Five Domains of Women's Relational Health Framework for teams, coaches, and leaders who want to improve the relational health for their respective female-dominated populations, including their employees, clients, students, and members. Learn more at womensrelationalhealthinstitute.com.

# Gathering: Key Findings and Takeaways

*Women want to host their friends, but there are barriers that prevent them from doing it.*

**The "hosting paradox".** 55% of women say their home is too small or not presentable enough to host, but 80% say that as a guest, a welcoming experience matters more than a beautiful home.

**44% of women want to host** more often than they do. Among women aged 18–29, the figure is 54%.

**Cost and energy are the top barriers.** 43% name the cost of hosting and 42% name the energy it takes to plan. Cost is the single biggest barrier for the most women (19%).

**Exhaustion keeps women home, and young women are the most worn out.**64% turned down at least one gathering invitation in the past year; 76% stayed home because they were too tired or overwhelmed or didn't feel like socializing. Among women 18–29 who skipped a gathering, 66% said they were too tired or overwhelmed, compared with 29% of women 60 and older.

**Hosting is a shared job, and women want help.** 57% say help from others would make them more likely to host: bringing food, helping with set-up or clean-up, or having someone to help plan.

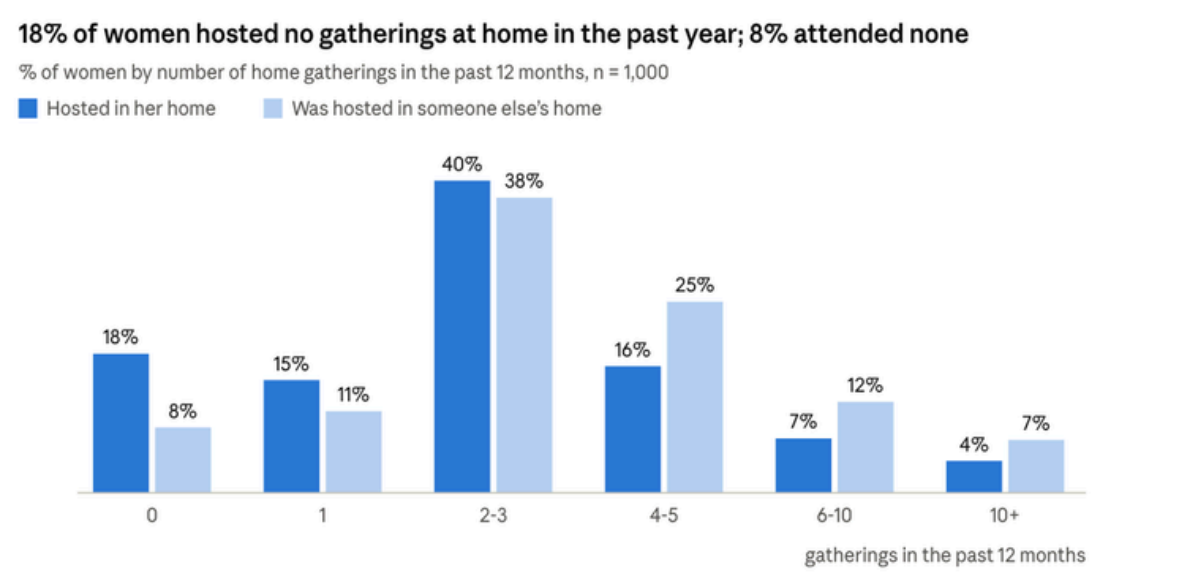
**Small circles and less hosting.** 39% of women have two or fewer close friends, and 51% of women aged 18–29 do, and this is impacting hosting.

**Guests want comfort over curation.** 52% say a relaxed, low-pressure atmosphere matters most when they attend a gathering, the top answer. A highly curated experience was the most-chosen item for "matters least" (61%).

# How frequently women host and attend gatherings

## Data & Analysis

Most women host occasionally, but they're guests more often than hosts. 47% attended more home gatherings than they hosted in the past year, and 18% hosted more than they attended. One in three (32%) hosted once or not at all.

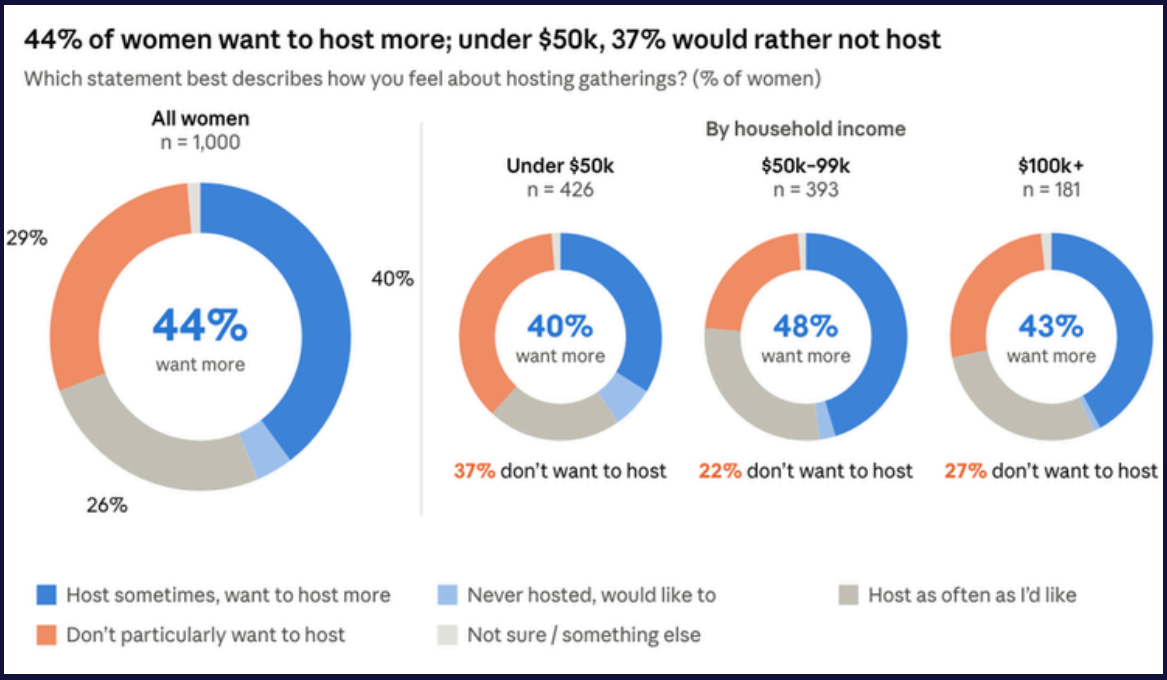


# The desire is there, but there are barriers.

## Data & Analysis

44% want to host more often than they do: 40% host sometimes but want to do more, and 4% have never hosted but would like to.

**Among the 44% who want to host more, cost is the leading barrier.**



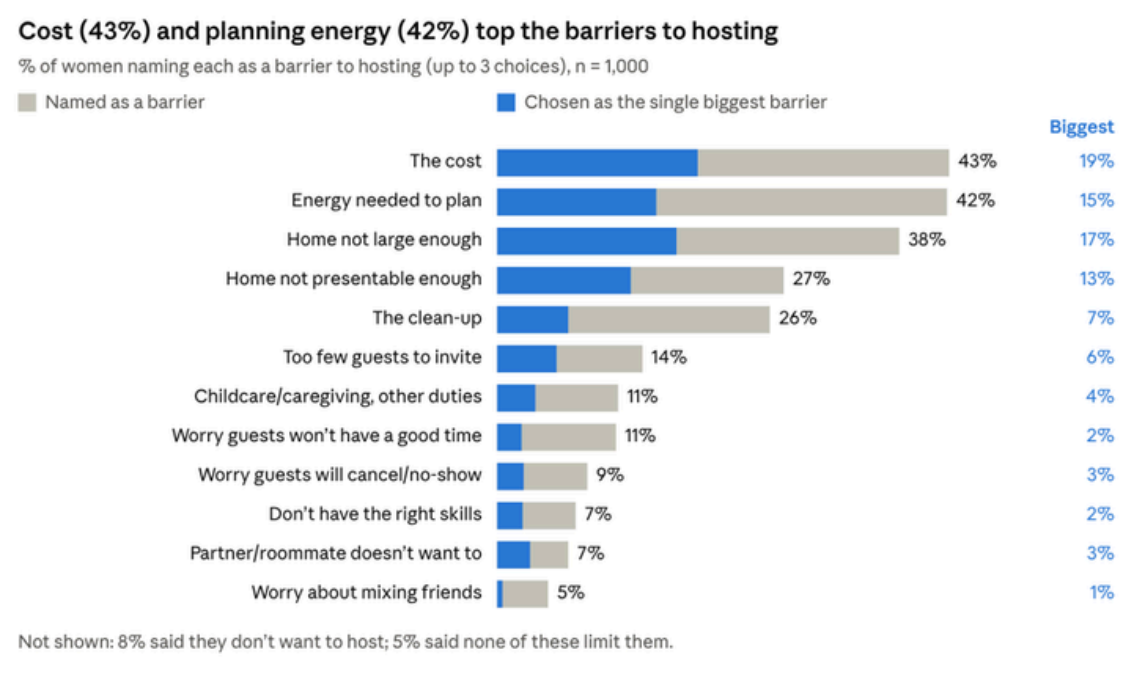
# The desire is there, but there are barriers.

Key barrier themes emerged:

1)Cost is the barrier to hosting that women name most often (43%), and it's also the one most often picked as the single biggest (19%).

2)The home itself is the second big theme. 55% name at least one home-related barrier: it's not large enough (38%) or not presentable enough (27%).

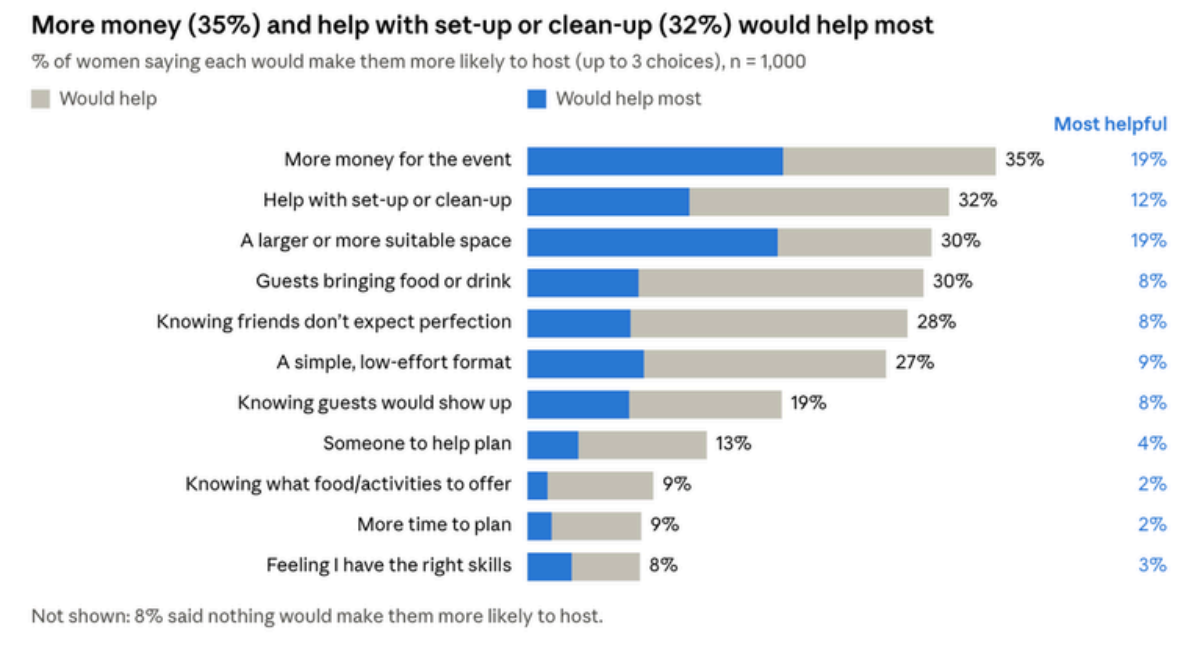
3)Effort: 55% name the energy to plan, the clean-up, or both.



# What would motivate women to host more?

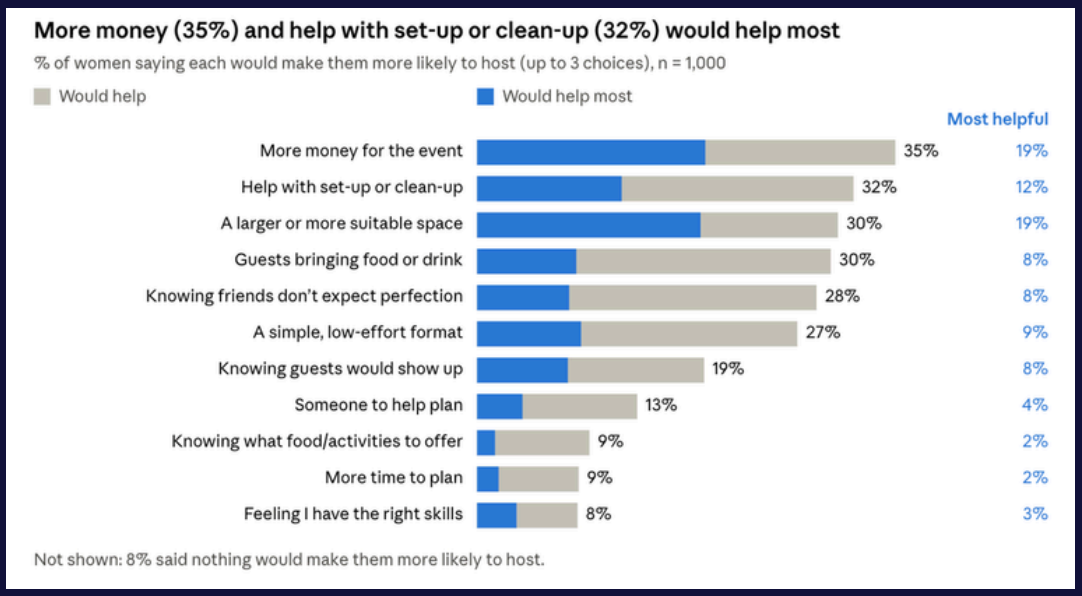
Besides money, shared effort is the most impactful on likelihood to host. 57% chose at least one help-from-others option: guests bringing food, help with set-up or clean-up, or someone to help plan.

Reassurance/social support is also big. 28% say knowing their friends don't expect a perfect home would help; that rises to 49% among women who said their home isn't presentable enough.

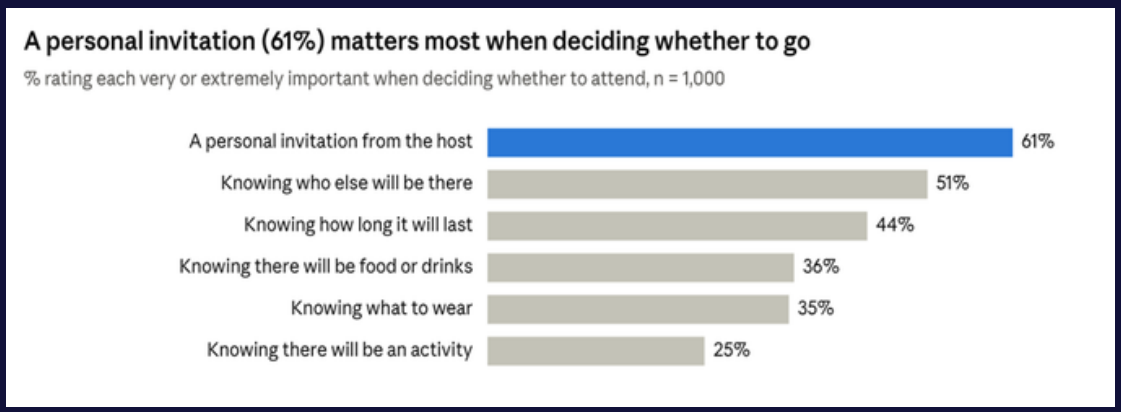


# Why women say “no” when they’re invited

**Nearly two-thirds (64%) of women turned down at least one gathering invitation in the past year. Low energy—not busy calendars— was the biggest reason.**

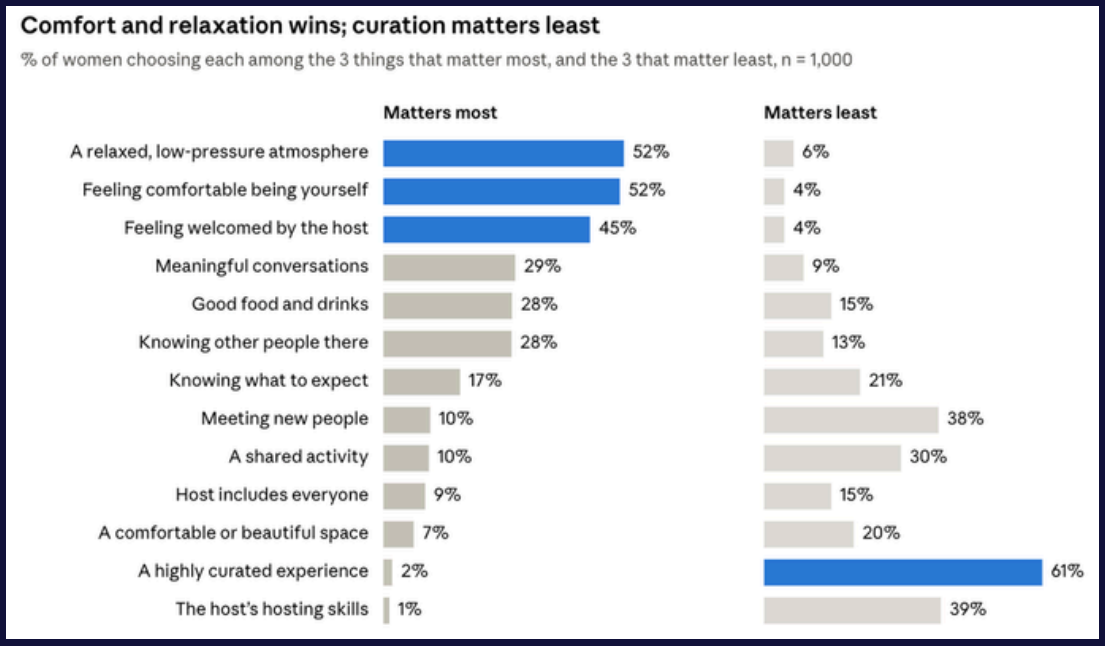



**When women decide whether to go, a personal invitation carries the most weight.**



# What matters most, least in a gathering

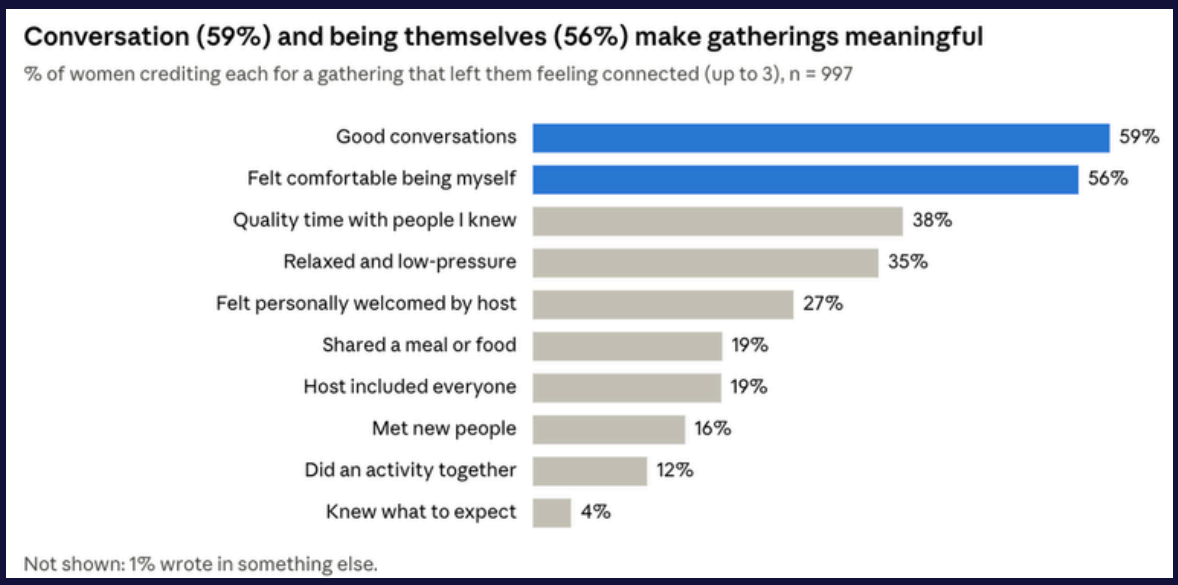
**Comfort and relaxation win; curation matters least.**




**When women recall a gathering that left them feeling connected, they credit good conversation (59%) and feeling comfortable being themselves (56%). Next come quality time with people they already knew (38%) and a relaxed, low-pressure environment (35%). Shared activities (12%) and knowing what to expect (4%) were rarely credited.**

# What matters most, least in a gathering

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# The “Hosting Paradox”

Asked to choose directly, 80% say a welcoming, enjoyable experience matters more than a beautiful or curated home. Only 2% pick the home, 15% say both matter equally, and 3% say neither matters much.

The same holds among women who worry their own home isn't presentable enough: 86% of them pick the welcoming experience as guests. This suggests there is a “perfection gap”: women hold their own homes to a standard they don't apply as guests.



# Differences by age, income, and friendship circle

**Age shapes how tired women are and how eager they are to host. Income shapes whether they host at all. The table lists only the differences that are statistically significant (chi-square, p < .05).**

| Measure | 18–29 | 30–44 | 45–59 | 60+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Want to host more often | 54% | 42% | 41% | 41% |
| Has 2 or fewer close friends | 51% | 39% | 35% | 32% |
| "Knowing friends don't expect my home to be perfect" would help | 37% | 29% | 25% | 21% |
| Skipped a gathering because too tired/overwhelmed* | 66% | 57% | 52% | 29% |
| Skipped a gathering because of childcare/ caregiving* | 15% | 23% | 11% | 3% |

# Differences by age, income, and friendship circle

**The more close friends a woman has, the more she both hosts and attends gatherings (Spearman ρ = .26 for each, p < .001).**

| Measure | Under $50k | $50–99k | $100k+ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hosted no gatherings in the past year | 26% | 12% | 11% |
| Doesn't particularly want to host | 37% | 22% | 27% |
| Cost is a barrier to hosting | 47% | 41% | 35% |
| Too few guests to invite is a barrier | 17% | 12% | 11% |
| Has 2 or fewer close friends | 46% | 39% | 23% |

*USING A SUB-SAMPLE OF WOMEN WHO SAID THEY HAD TURNED DOWN AN INVITATION OR WEREN'T SURE (N = 671).

# Conclusion and Recommendations

The research presented in our "Gathering" report is a combination of discoveries from our "Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey" as well as expert observations and findings from multiple institutions that provide helpful insight into the state of women's relational health.

Across demographics and contexts, we are seeing a need for women to receive support, prioritize comfort over curation, and to generally increase time with friends.

## Key takeaways and recommendations

| | Recommendations |
|---|---|
| 1 | HOSTING SUPPORT: Hosts should lean into seeking instrumental support from attendees. Depending on the size and format of the gathering, attendees might appreciate having a specific assignment, as this may increase their sense of mattering. This might also contribute to a spirit of community to the gathering. |
| 2 | ENERGY INVENTORY: Women would host and gather if they had more energy, which begs the question of why women are feeling emotionally, physically, and/ or mentally depleted (through both an individual and societal lens). It's also an opportunity for women to evaluate self-imposed expectations of what it means to host or attend a gathering. |
| 3 | FRIENDSHIP AND SOCIALIZATION: There seems to be a relationship between a women's number of close friends and her gathering frequency. We encourage women to explore the current state of the friendships and socializing with their goals and habits in each of these areas, as they may be connected. |

# Next steps

The Women's Relational Health Institute is here to help.

## ABOUT US

Our research finds that poor relational health for women in predominately female spaces leads to anxiety, low job satisfaction, and unhappiness. The Women's Relational Health Institute is the first organization offering specialized support in this area.

With evidence-based strategies, consulting, workshops, and certification programs, we exist to help those in leadership build stronger bonds between the women on their teams. Because not only does it lead to an overall lack of engagement, harmony, and retention, but it also impacts the ladies' individual wellbeing and sense of self.

[Learn more **here** or send us a message at team@womensrelationalhealthinstitute.com.

### Certification

We offer exclusive programs for women who want to be certified as women's relational health coaches. Currently we are training professors, pastors, therapists, and life coaches who believe they'd benefit from knowing more research and strategies to help their female clients with issues of conflict and connection.

### Consulting

Female-dominated organizations bring us in to train their leadership team on women's connection research, and then we customize strategies to build trust and connection among its members. This improves retention, morale, and engagement.

### Speaking

Do you have an upcoming conference, summit, or team meeting where your audience would benefit from an engaging (and inspiring!) presentation highlighting the data from this report? We'll connect you with members from our team.

### Workshops

We can work with your members to facilitate open discussions as they work to co-create individual and team plans that enhance their relational health. This can be customized for various ages, ethnicities, and industries.