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**Intro:** Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talk through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women.

We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life, and how to live every bit of our lives to the full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

I'm so excited about today's episode. Today we're talking about friendship. You guys, I learned so much in this episode. Our guest is absolutely brilliant. And I cannot wait for you to hear from her.

Our guest for today's episode is Dr. Marisa G. Franco. Marisa has a book called *Platonic: How the Science of Attachment Can Help You Make—and Keep—Friends*. Marisa is a psychologist and international speaker and a New York Times bestselling author. She's known for digesting and communicating the science of human connection in ways that resonate deeply enough with people to change their lives. I love that.

Here are just a few of the things that she's going to teach us in this episode. She's going to teach us why friendship is so essential no matter what stage of life you're in. She's going to teach us how to not only make new friendships but also keep our friendships. She's going to teach us what an attachment style is and how we can figure out what ours is. She'll talk to us about how to make new friends as an adult and improve the quality of our friendships, and so much more.

Friends if you've been looking for deeper connections in your friendships, you are in the right place. Marisa has an abundance of knowledge to share with us on this topic, and I cannot wait for you to meet her.

But before we dive in, there's a resource I wanted to make sure to share with you. And it's my devotional. It's called *The Lipstick Gospel Devotional*. It's a 90-day devotional to help you consistently connect with God, hearing from Him, trusting His plans, and feeling His presence in your everyday life.

In this devotional, we talk about how to consistently spend time with God and feel connected to Him well beyond your morning quiet times, how to trust the plans that God has for your life and how to figure out what those plans are, how to step into your God-given identity feeling truly beautiful and good enough in your skin, how to keep your faith strong in the midst of transition, uncertainty and really hard days,

how to add more joy, more delight, and even more whimsy into your everyday life, and so much more.

This devotional is the perfect companion as you're diving deeper into the Bible. And if you're looking to grow in your faith these days, I'd love to share it with you. To pick up a copy, just go to [stephaniemaywilsonshop.com](http://stephaniemaywilsonshop.com) or you can click the link in my Instagram profile. I'm @smaywilson over on Instagram.

Okay, with that said, let's jump into the episode. Here's my conversation with Marisa.

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**Stephanie:** All right, friends, I am so excited for who you get to meet today. I am sitting here with my new friend, Dr. Marisa G. Franco. Marisa, thank you so much for coming on the show.

**Dr. Marisa:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Stephanie:** You have a new book that came out really recently. And we were just talking about this: it just hit the New York Times bestseller list, which is wild and totally deserving. I'm not all the way through it yet, I'm like taking my time and scribbling through it, but I mean, I got like just pages in and was like, "We need to have Marisa on the show." Congratulations.

**Dr. Marisa:** Thank you so much. I'm really happy to be chatting with you.

**Stephanie:** For women who don't know who you are yet, can you tell us who you are, what you do, and a fun fact about yourself?

**Dr. Marisa:** Yeah. I am a professor, psychologist, national speaker, author of *Platonic: How the Science of Attachment Can Help You Make—and Keep—Friends*. My fun fact: when I was young, I actually got scuba certified and volunteered at the zoo at their big Halloween fest to swim in the otter tank in a like scary, I don't know, creature of the dark lagoon costume and bang on the window when people pass by.

**Stephanie:** Oh, my... Did you get scuba certified just for that purpose?

**Dr. Marisa:** I didn't. I didn't. But they really capitalized on the scuba certification at the zoo.

**Stephanie:** That is so amazing. Both my husband and I got certified a handful of years ago and I feel like it's one of the coolest, most daring things I've ever like... I never thought that I would be a scuba diving type of person. I don't even know that I like

snorkeling. But my whole family got certified and it was sort of a FOMO kind of situation. And I'm so glad because it's so cool. Do you still do that?

**Dr. Marisa:** Not as much because I found it very hard to equalize where you like try to clear the air pressure. I still enjoy the water so much and I do a lot of snorkeling.

**Stephanie:** That's so cool. That's so cool. Well, I love that. Bonus points if you have pictures of that anywhere. I'm just saying. I definitely didn't warn you of that. So you mentioned your book, we've talked about it a little bit. Tell us more about where this book came from, like where the idea came from. Tell us more about the book. What's the backstory for *Platonic*?

**Dr. Marisa:** So in my young 20s, I went through a breakup and I felt really bad. So to heal, I started this wellness group with my friends where we met up and we cooked and we did yoga, and we meditated together. And it was so life-changing for me. Beyond all the wellness, I think what was most healing was just being in community with people that I love, who loved me every week.

The group really made me question some ideas that I had about love that I realized were really harming me. I felt like, you know, romantic love was the love that made me worthy. And if I didn't have it, I didn't have any love in my life at all. And I looked around at these friends and I was like, "Well, this is still love. Why doesn't this count? Why doesn't this matter."

And now I feel like in a lonely society, we can't really afford to throw even a morsel of connection away and that friendship is this gold of connection under our feet but we treat it like concrete. So I was really motivated to write *Platonic* because I thought it would really benefit us all if we level this hierarchy that we place our love and started to see connection as valuable in whatever form it comes in in our lives.

**Stephanie:** I love that. There's several pages that I just highlighted about this, but I want to hear it from you. Why is friendship valuable? What happens to us in our lives when we have good friends?

**Dr. Marisa:** So you know how we focus on things like diet and exercise, and doing all those things to be healthy and live a long life? Actually, the research on social connection finds that it affects how long we live more than our diet or exercise, almost like twice as much. Yeah, right? It's really shocking.

And that, I think, is really any form of connection: romantic, platonic, familial. But I think there are certain reasons why friendships still really matter to us. I think a

lot of the time we see this tension between our spouse and our friends, right? If I'm hanging out with my friends and not hanging out with my spouse.

But the research really shows us that having friends makes our romantic relationships better. That when we get into conflict with our spouse, and we have friends, it doesn't affect our stress hormone release in the same way.

Women in particular, are more resilient to stress in their marriage when they have support outside the marriage. That when we make a friend, it not only makes us less depressed, but it makes our spouse less depressed. Whereas people that only rely on a spouse, what we see in the research is that their mental health really goes up and down with how their relationships going with their spouse. And they're not as resilient when things aren't going well, when there's this natural ebb and flow.

And so it's a resource for us when we're getting into conflict with our spouse to be able to center ourselves by venting and getting that support outside the marriage because then we return to the marriage in a centered loving place to be like, "Let's work through this conflict" instead of feeling downtrodden and feeling very cynical, because we're not feeling centered by connection anymore.

**Stephanie:** That is wild. Like it really impacts, I guess, our quality of life, but also our health that much?

**Dr. Marisa:** Yeah, it is really wild. And that's partially because loneliness is chronic stress. Like when you're lonely, it's not just a feeling, it's a state of mind. People that are lonely, basically their brains become very vigilant for signs that they're being rejected.

Because if you think about this, historically, right, you're on this African Savannah, you're alone, you're in danger. And so that's what your body tells you when you're lonely now. "You're in danger. Look out for peace signs that people are going to reject you and or harm you." So your body is sort of inflamed, your sleep is disrupted, your memory is disrupted. It's like living in fight or flight mode when you're feeling really lonely. And that's why it can really deteriorate our bodies over time.

**Stephanie:** That is crazy. Man, I feel like I need to sit on that for a while. I know you did so much research for this book. What were some of the most... I mean, you might have just said them, but I'd love to hear anything that comes to mind. What were some of the most surprising things where you were like, "I had no idea that friendship worked that way or it impacted us this way or that..." Just anything that kind of caught your eye about friendship as you were doing all this research.

**Dr. Marisa:** So, Stephanie, do you know that the people that are most likely to reject you are actually the people that fear rejection the most? People that are what's called rejection sensitive, when someone interacts with them and it's sort of ambiguous, they interpreted as rejection. Like, "I didn't hear back from you in a certain amount of time. I think you're rejecting me."

And then they get cold and withdrawn. And maybe your friend was just hungry. And you get cold and withdrawn and you actually reject people. So the more you think that you're going to be rejected, the more you get into self-defense mode where you're now rejecting everybody.

That, I think, is one of the interesting takeaways from the book, that when we think we're being rejected all the time, we're likely not being very kind or good in our relationships. Like people will be like, "I don't reach out because they don't want to hear from me." But fundamentally, how's that coming off to other people that you don't care about them? Right?

So what I share in the book is that to really benefit our friendships we have to assume people like us. Because according to the research, when researchers told people that "you're gonna go to this group and they're gonna like you,"—it was a complete lie, deception—they found that when people made that assumption, it made them warmer, friendlier, and more open, and it became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So there's all these ways that like what we assume about the world fundamentally becomes true, not because it is true, but because it impacts our behaviors in a way that we almost manifest it to become true.

**Stephanie:** Oh, my gosh! I've used this example before in different settings. But like if you're afraid that you're annoying and you ask people over and over again if you're annoying, eventually that will be annoying.

**Dr. Marisa:** Exactly. Exactly.

**Stephanie:** I feel like I do this a lot with my husband. I'll interpret some piece of body language or some nonverbal cue or some tone or something as him being frustrated or in a bad mood or upset. And I'll ask him if he is, and he's like, "No, I'm fine," but I've decided that that's what's true. So then I'll ask another couple times, and then eventually he is upset because I've asked him enough time.

**Dr. Marisa:** Exactly.

**Stephanie:** And it just is like, "Oh, my gosh, I could have stopped that so much sooner." I'm working on that. I'm working on it. So if someone is afraid of rejection they are going to like... I mean, we know the thing about rejecting other people first. Like if you're afraid that a relationship is going to fail or something, you know, there's some sort of self-sabotage thing that happens. But you're saying it's even a step further than that. That if we are afraid we're going to be rejected, then we're going to come across as less friendly, making it more probable that we will be.

**Dr. Marisa:** Yeah. There's this theory called Risk Regulation Theory, which just argues that we walk along this line between being in self-protection mode and pro-relationship mode. When we're in self-protection mode, I'm not reaching out, I'm being cold, I'm not being vulnerable, I'm not expressing affection or happiness towards you, I don't trust you. That that is the opposite of pro-relationship mode. And the longer we're in that mode, the more we harm our relationships.

I'm not saying sometimes it isn't necessary. When you're around people that are untrustworthy, it's adaptive. But when you're in pro-relationship mode, fundamentally you are more vulnerable. It's more of a risk. You're reaching out. Now you could be rejected. You're telling people you like and value them, you're being vulnerable. It makes rejection a higher risk.

And so if you are constantly in self-protection mode, you may not be realizing it, but the consequence is that you are harming your relationships, which is why I think it need self-protection mode in the moment. But in the long run, you know, if you continue to push people away, that's causing you more harm, because relationships are one of the best resources that we have to get through life.

So it requires us to switch from self-protection mode to pro-relationship mode if we want to make friends and if we want to connect with people, which is inherently risky. There's really no way of getting around that riskiness. But I think, again, the biggest risk of all is staying in your place of distrust and isolation because being isolated is what's going to harm you the most as we talked about.

**Stephanie:** Yeah, yeah, that makes sense. I've heard this phrase before, but I don't know very much about it. I know that one of the big things you talked about in the book is attachment style. First of all, what is an attachment style? I can guess but I don't know that I would guess right. So give us a rundown on attachment style.

**Dr. Marisa:** So attachment style is basically a template you form for how people will treat you and a set of behaviors that you react to in response to those assumptions. So it forms in our early childhood. With our parents, how they treat us becomes our template for how the world will treat us, right?

So if we're securely attached, our parents showed us that people will love us, people are trustworthy. We go into the world with these assumptions and it facilitates us being able to connect with people in healthy ways. Because, again, assuming people like you continues to benefit your relationships.

But people that are insecurely attached, their template, their early childhood relationships were not as positive. They didn't get some fundamental needs met. And it could be early child relationships. Your attachment style can also evolve over time. So it could be not just your parents, but other relationships.

So we have anxiously attached people who learned... their parents tended to be overbearing or intrusive and we're unable to fully show up for them emotionally. These anxiously attached people think other people are always rejecting them and are going to abandon them.

Like we talked about, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy or like, you know, you're, again, always asking people to reassure you, and eventually they kind of get fed up. Or you're so afraid of rejection that you're almost being a little bit coercive in trying to get people to connect with you. It seems like they're not interested and you continue to try to text them and convince them to hang out with you. And fundamentally that people like to have agency to do things in their relationships. So, again, it becomes this sort of self-fulfilling prophecy when you think everybody's gonna reject you and abandon you.

But then you also have avoidantly attached people. They similarly think people will reject and abandon them. Their childhoods tended to be, you know, there was food, there was shelter, but there wasn't any emotional warmth. So they experienced a lot of emotional neglect.

So what they learned was that I can't trust people and I need to go through this thing called life alone. I'm going to suppress all my feelings, other people are untrustworthy, and I'm going to almost isolate myself because of that. So they tend to really push people away and not invest in their relationships.

And again, obviously, this can be a self-fulfilling prophecy where you think people aren't trustworthy. You're not investing in your friendships, and then you're like, "Well, people aren't hanging out with me. People aren't welcoming me. But you kind of made them feel rejected by not investing in the relationship at all.

So yes, these are the three different attachment styles, three different sets of assumptions, and fundamentally three different personalities. I argue in the book that our personalities are a reflection of our connection or lack thereof, in the past. That whether we are warm, friendly, loving, trusting, you know, vulnerable, all of

these things are reflections of our previous relationships and become embedded in part of our personalities.

**Stephanie:** How do we fix this?

**Dr. Marisa:** It's hard... but possible. I wanted to make sure I mention that because people will listen to me and be like, "Good for those people with healthy childhoods. Screw me, I guess." I just want to say that actually research finds that your attachment style, in some studies, is more likely to change over time than it is to stay the same. So it's totally possible to change your attachment style. And even knowing about your attachment style can help change it, some research finds.

I think I have a few tips. In the book, I get into too many, many more. We need to begin to hold our insecurities more loosely. So if I think people are rejecting me or judging me, to be able to acknowledge "I think that, but I know I'm not sure. I don't know if it's actually true. This is an ambiguous situation." And so it's not about never feeling insecure, but not necessarily believing your insecurities in the same way.

And then the other thing that I suggest, right, people with insecure attachment styles, they fundamentally just feel very unsafe in relationships. Like they feel very unsafe connecting with people. And the issue is that once you have this template formed, you then read moments of unsafety and you ignore moments of safety. And it feels like, again, whatever your assumption is, is true because anything that's counter to that truth, you don't actually receive it or take it in or acknowledge it.

So I really like the work of this psychologist, Rick Hanson. He studies taking in the good, which is basically savoring experiences of safety to override your brain's tendency to focus on the opposite experiences of threat.

So when someone responds to your text message, when someone holds the door for you, when someone smiles at you, when someone shows up when they said they would, pausing... he talks about absorbing the experience, which means focusing on it until it stirs an emotion in you like joy, like feeling cared for. And then he talks about enriching it which means visualizing that experience sinking into your body and almost becoming a part of you.

So it can just be a minute, when someone responds to you positively, for you to actually savor it, be intentional about registering it and receiving it because... You know, he talks about when we do this we release dopamine and norepinephrine in our brain, which fundamentally helped change our brain. It changes, you know, our.... our brain is very plastic. New experiences we have can change how it's wired.



And so if we can make this a practice of instead of always registering threat that matches our preconceived notions, we're instead going to very much focus on acknowledging and safety and acknowledging acceptance. That can help us become more secure.

**Stephanie:** That makes a lot of sense. I like that a lot. I also like the idea of not necessarily believing your insecurities or... You know, I like that you said, "Hold on loosely, not necessarily combat them." Because I think that, you know, if you walk into a room and you think, "Everyone is thinking about the fact that I am tall," like, you know... I'm pretty tall. So you walk into a room and everyone's thinking, "Wow, she's really tall." Well, I mean, you can try to convince yourself "No, like, people are not thinking that or people think I'm short." But that's not either true or that's also hard to prove. So it feels like it requires a couple extra steps and like it allows more doubt to kind of creep in of what's actually true.

But if you just throw some doubt into the situation, period, and just say, "They might be thinking this, but I don't know," instead of trying to convince yourself that they're thinking the opposite, that just seems like it's a less of a stretch, but also really freeing.

And I think generally, I mean, there's probably something to back this up. I'd love to know if there is. But the idea that most people aren't thinking about us, they're thinking about themselves. Have you found anything? Has there been any research? Or did you find anything on that?

**Dr. Marisa:** Yeah. It's called the spotlight effect. We think we're at the center of the spotlight. But, you know, people are focusing a lot more on themselves than us. It's like these studies where people wore these really silly shirts and were like, "How much do you think other people are thinking about this shirt?" And people were actually like, "I'm not. I didn't even notice that shirt that you wore."

So it's absolutely true. And something to remind yourself of like, "Oh, my gosh, I think I did something that was awful and everybody's judging me." People are judging you less than you think and people are focusing more on themselves than they are on you. And this is the science-backed conclusion that I'm sharing with you.

**Stephanie:** I love that. That's so helpful. Is there a way to figure out our attachment style? Or is it more kind of after hearing sort of the descriptions, people are like, "Ah, yeah, that one's me."

**Dr. Marisa:** Yeah, I can share more of the traits and characteristics we tend to see with each attachment. So let's start with anxious. You tend to take things very personally. You think you're being rejected even when you're not. That's your first assumption. You think your friends really don't like you. You can get close to people really quickly. You tend to overshare actually as a way to test people and see if they'll stick around, see if they will abandon you.

But your relationships tend to be a little more volatile. They move very quickly, and then they kind of will blow up over time. They're just sort of a little bit more fragile because you don't necessarily give it the time to form that foundation. Because again, you want that reassurance they're all in.

You struggle with conflict because you think people are gonna abandon. You won't bring up issues in friendships. And when you do, it gets the point where you're ready to sort of attack them, because you didn't bring it up earlier. And you know, fundamentally, you're just really afraid in your friendships that people are going to reject you. You might not reach out as much because you think people don't care and that they're not really thinking about you, that they're going to reject you.

You have a lot of trouble validating your own feelings. You always think the other person's right and you're wrong. When you find someone pulling away from you, you engage in what's called fawning. Fawning happens when we're threatened. There's fight, flight, freeze, and fawn, all these threat responses that we can have.

When we're threatened, we try to get people to like us, we try to soften them, which means you might pursue relationships with people that aren't actually invested in you and don't tend to care for you. Sometimes you engage on behaviors that on the surface really help friendships like being really generous, but you tend to be egoistic about it.

So if you are generous to someone you're like, "Well, are you going to do that back for me." Like it's almost can be a little bit... I don't want to say manipulative because I think anxious people are kind of generous. But they do a lot of things to feel like the other person is going to love them back instead of because they just want to express their love for someone. So that's anxious attachment.

Avoidantly attached people. You don't trust people. You feel suffocated very easily. When people try to get close to you, you pull away. You're not very vulnerable. Your friends feel like they're around you, but they don't really know you. You might have a lot of shallow friendships. You might not have that many friends.

You tend to ghost. You're very uncomfortable with feelings both other people's and your own. So if other people have feelings or are vulnerable with you, you have

trouble and you don't really express your feelings towards other people. You're just very uncomfortable with vulnerability, both other people and your own.

And for other attachment styles, when people are vulnerable, they feel closer to the other person. But when people are vulnerable with you or when you're vulnerable, you feel maybe even like disgust or discomfort coming from some of your past.

And so, you know, you tend to have fewer friendships and you don't invest in them and you don't make as much effort. And some friends might have been very frustrated with you for that, but you feel like maybe they're just making a big deal and they're expecting too much and they're sensitive. So you have this unwritten rule that everybody should just be relying on themselves. And anybody who breaks that rule, you feel like... you judge them basically.

And then we have securely attached people who feel they're more confident. they trust people until someone gives them a reason not to. They can be vulnerable but if the other person isn't reciprocating, different from the anxious fawning response, they walk away. They don't work harder if someone doesn't like them.

They bring up conflict in a way that's not attacking the other person. And they engage in mutuality, which means when they address friendship issues, when they navigate their world of friendship, they're thinking about both the other person and them at the same time and thinking about how do I solve this problem in a way that benefits both of us.

Anxiously attached people, they're just fulfilling others' needs, they're not thinking about their own. Avoidantly attached people, they're just fulfilling their own needs not thinking about other people's. Secure people, they're all about that sense of balance. They tend to have more long-lasting relationships. Their relationships have lasted a really long time. They're comfortable with very close relationships, but they could also have like a larger network of looser ties. So in general, I call them the super friends because they just have thriving friendships that last over time and people really enjoy being friends with them.

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**Sponsor:** Hey friends! If you've been considering going to therapy but wondering where to find a good counselor or how to afford it, there is a resource I wanted to share with you. It's one of our amazing Girls Night podcast sponsors, [Faithful Counseling](#).

Faithful Counseling is a website where you can get matched up with a Christian counselor for professional online therapy sessions. This is truly the easiest and most affordable way to find a faith-based counselor. Now, you may have heard me talk

about Faithful Counseling before, but just in case you haven't, I wanted to tell you four quick reasons why I love them so much.

The first is that it's easy to get started. All you have to do is go to their website and fill out a form about yourself, what you're going through, what you're looking for in a counselor. And within 24 hours, Faithful Counseling will connect you with a licensed, vetted, faith-based professional counselor.

Second reason I love it is that it's easy to schedule. Once you're connected to a therapist, you can start communicating with them in less than 24 hours. You can also log into your account at any time and send a message to your therapist and you'll get timely and thoughtful responses back.

You can also schedule weekly video or phone sessions. And the best part is you can do it all virtually. No commute, no awkward waiting room time, less time away from work. You can even do your sessions in your PJs, which I love.

The third reason I love them is that it's easy to find the right counselor for you. In order for counseling to be truly beneficial, you need to find a counselor you really connect with. And often we don't find the right person on our first try. So then we're stuck going through the whole process of breaking up with our counselor, which can be awkward and then starting from scratch to find a new one.

But with Faithful Counseling, if you don't love your counselor or if you find that you're looking for something different, you can switch by clicking a button. It's easy and it's free. They really make it easy to find the best fit possible.

And then the last reason I love them is that it's easier to fit in your budget. Well, I love traditional in-person counseling. It can cost more than \$100 per session, which just makes it a total no go for so many of us, especially in a time when the economy is all over the place. But Faithful Counseling is significantly less expensive and they have financial aid available.

And if you sign it through the special link that they gave me, you can get 10% off your first month. If there'll be something you've been considering or something you think might be helpful for you right now, head on over to [stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling](http://stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling). That link will also give you 10% off your first month. Again, that's [stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling](http://stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling) for all the info, and you can get 10% off your first month of counseling there too.

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**Stephanie:** Okay, that's very helpful. I want to go back because now I have more questions. I think everyone's like, "Okay, I have more questions." So you said kind of in the beginning that your kind of perspective or your thesis on this is that our personalities are shaped by our previous relationships. And you said that could be our parents, but it also could be other friendships?

**Dr. Marisa:** Mm-hmm. Or romantic relationships.

**Stephanie:** Okay. So we could have, you know, really healthy, loving, but not overbearing parents, but then go through a breakup or have something happen with a friend, or you know, something like that anytime in our life and that can change our attachment style?

**Dr. Marisa:** Yes, it can. And we can also have attachment styles are very complex. We can also have different attachment styles in different relationships. I see sometimes people are secure in romance, insecure in friendship, or vice versa—insecure in romance and secure in friendship, too.

And then fundamentally attachment is a dynamic, right? If you have someone who is always trying to be close to you and reaching out to you all the time, and you don't necessarily have time for them, and they don't seem to really respect your boundaries, that anxious behavior is gonna make you a little bit avoidant, logically. You're gonna pull away and be like, "Okay, this is a little too much. I still have other things to do. I can't fulfill all these expectations."

And if someone's avoidant towards you where you're just like, "Oh, I texted you, I didn't hear back from you for a whole day," or "I've shown interest in being your friend and I haven't necessarily gotten any of that same energy from you," you're inevitably going to be a little bit anxious, right?

So there's this way that, yes, it's our internal template and we have a global attachment style, which means underlying attachment that tends to show up more often than not, but there's also a lot of fluidity to it. So we can have different attachment styles and different types of relationships. And even within the context of all our friendships, sometimes we can feel more anxious, sometimes we can feel more avoidant.

**Stephanie:** Okay. Okay. You said that by figuring out kind of what our attachment styles are in different relationships, that can be a really powerful step forward in terms of changing them. Like if we are sitting here going, wow, I have some of those avoidant tendencies or some of those anxious tendencies, figuring that out is a good step in the right direction?

**Dr. Marisa:** Yeah, absolutely. Because if you have insecure attachment, you're engaging in certain behaviors that prove your attachment style true. So if you know what some of those behaviors are and you change your behaviors, your confirmation bias, your template is going to be proved false. If you can change your behaviors, you can change how you think about your relationships because you're gonna get a different response.

So that is why it's really important to know our attachment style because we stop engaging in these behaviors that kind of influence or lead to what we're most afraid of. And then we get a different sense of the world, which is what's really important for changing our attachment style.

And not only that, but when we do engage in these different behaviors and we get different outcomes, that's a moment to savor and that's a moment to receive, just like I spoke about earlier. Actually, focus on "this time went different. This time I tried to address conflict and it went well and I felt closer to that person. So let me take a moment to receive that and to focus on that and to feel the joy of that in my body."

So that you can start making some of these changes become more hardwired in you instead of... Because, you know, anxious people aren't like, "Yeah, I'm trying to like..." I don't know. "I feel like I'm doing it intentionally where I'm assuming I'm going to be rejected." It's not an intellectual experience. It's an emotional experience. It's like my body feels like it's on fire and I need someone to do something about this.

So I think it has to become what's called embodied in that it has to be an emotional experience of love and acceptance that you have. And taking something that's intellectual, like, "Someone was loving towards me" or "did show up for me." We have to make it emotional, we have to feel in response to that to begin to change our reactions.

**Stephanie:** Okay. So the mental picture I just got was like baking a cake. If we have put too much salt in and we've come out with a salty cake for years and years and years, we think every time we make a cake it's salty. But if we can look at what we're putting in and say, "Hey, I think I tend to put in a little too much salt," or "Hey, I think I tend to come out a little too strong in friendships" or "I tend to avoid vulnerability a lot and it makes my friendships kind of to surface level or something," then we can be like, "Okay, I'm gonna pull back on the salt."

**Dr. Marisa:** Exactly.

**Stephanie:** And then you taste the cake and it tastes less salty. That like kind of reinforces... it helps us. And then if we really sit and embody it and really pay attention to that new results, that's what starts to change us moving forward.

**Dr. Marisa:** Exactly. I love that metaphor, Stephanie. And I would add to it that we may be putting in salt, but we're thinking we're putting in sugar. So the difference is that if we think we're putting in sugar, we're just gonna be like, "Screw this recipe. This website sucks," instead of looking at our own behavior.

And I think that's where a lot of anxious and avoidant people end up where they're like, "People just suck. People are going to abandon you at the end of the day. People can't be trusted." They're making all of these external assumptions about everyone else instead of looking at themselves because they have no idea that they're putting in salt instead of sugar.

That's why it's so helpful to acknowledge your own salt. Because then you know where to target the change. It's not that "I'm helpless. The world is this way." but it's like, "Oh, I actually can influence this outcome by changing the behaviors that I'm putting in the cake."

**Stephanie:** I love that. And I love the bravery of looking at ourselves honestly, and the fact that there is so much that can change when we do that. But sometimes it is other people. So how do we figure out like, "Is it me? Is it them?"

I think for some of us, and maybe this is... I think I probably lean a little bit more towards anxious than avoidant. And with lots of work in time, I think, you know, I'm much more in the secure attachment space. But I think that my go-to probably for most of my life would be to assume that it's my fault. So how do you find that balance between ownership and taking ownership of what's yours, but then also allowing other people to do the same?

**Dr. Marisa:** This is a great question. Because you're absolutely right. And the thing is, if you're anxious, you're attracted to people that mistreat you because they give you the chance to earn love. And that's what you learn—that you have to earn love. And when it comes to you, automatically, it's suspicious.

So fundamentally, it's not just about your assumptions, but that your assumptions are leading you to be friends with people that actually aren't healthy. So there is something real. There is this sort of dynamic between what you believe inside and what your world tends to be.

Similarly, if you're avoidant, you think that people are going to suffocate you and expect too much out of you and move to... You think that everybody is going to

treat you like someone anxious. But if someone secure meets you, they're like, "You're not putting in any effort into this friendship. I'm going to move on. If someone anxious meets you and they're like, "Oh, you're not putting any effort. Let me try harder," then you're fundamentally going to invite these anxious people into your life. And so there's this way that what our assumptions are is bridged into reality.

And I think being able to understand that requires us to think on two planes, in two dimensions. And that is, emotionally and intellectually about a situation. So if you're anxiously attached, again, you know, Stephanie, you mentioned feeling like it's always your fault and you're always the one doing things wrong, right?

And that is common with people that are anxiously attached. You know, they're very uncomfortable with their own anger and they don't validate their own feelings. And so they don't know what truth is because when their body is telling them this isn't all right, they're kind of just pushing it away.

So it takes being able to validate your own feelings and say, "Oh, I'm upset about this. I'm angry about this. Let me look at that," instead of "let me just assume it's my own fault." So being able to acknowledge your feelings and wonder about what they're telling you.

But also engaging intellectually in this exercise. So it's like, "Okay, I didn't hear back from my friend in three hours, my body feels like it's on fire. I acknowledge that. This really hurts me. I'm feeling so rejected." But when I also bring in the intellectual peace, my friend hadn't responded to me in three hours. Do I think that that is a harmful behavior? You might say, "Well, not necessarily. I know that this friend could be busy, there could be something going on."

And so it's being able to acknowledge the information on both sides to come up with a greater sense of truth. And you know, I think the issue with anxiously attached people is... for securely attached people, they can use their feelings more so as guides for whether someone is treating them okay or negatively.

But for anxiously attached people, they've so ignored their own feelings and invalidated their own feelings that their feelings have begun to become more extreme. Because they're like, "You need to acknowledge me. You acknowledge that you feel bad and you're being rejected." And so it becomes harder to understand what's truth and what's me reacting based on my history and feeling very triggered in this moment.

But once anxiously attached people continue to validate their feelings over time and learn that ability to pursue their own emotions, which requires validating your



feelings and tolerating that discomfort instead of trying to handle it by controlling other people, then they're going to be able to feel the more truth behind their emotions. Their emotions are going to become recalibrated so that they can begin to rely more on their emotions to tell them when something is going wrong or right in a relationship.

**Stephanie:** There's so much to that, I'm like, I need to sit with that for a while. I do remember there was one day where a friend of mine told me, "Stephanie, your emotions aren't always true or aren't always telling you the truth." And I was like, "What do you...?" "What? What? What do you mean?" It's a really hard thing. It's a hard thing to get your heart and your mind and everything that's happening around you to work together, I guess.

**Dr. Marisa:** It really is. I think insecurely attached people get triggered by relationships. And my reflections on triggers is that they're kind of the opposite of love, because they cause us to reduce someone to what they did to make us feel triggered. And love is seeing someone expansively and seeing someone very fully for who they are and giving them the benefit of the doubt. Whereas when we're triggered we do the opposite, right? We assume that this one behavior that they did means that they're like an awful human.

So I think we can be more responsible about our triggers by first of all thinking, "Am I reacting more strongly to the situation than the average person might?" Because then there might be more to this. It might not just be what they're doing to me, but what this trigger is about by history, what this trigger is about similar experiences that I've had before and I'm experiencing all that emotion cumulatively right now.

I think emotions are helpful, they provide information, but they're not the be all end all. It requires us to engage in self-reflection. Like, "This emotion is the signal. What is it signaling?" Is it signaling that someone is treating you negatively right now? Or is it signaling this experience reminds you of an earlier experience where someone really did cause a lot of harm to you?

**Stephanie:** I'm so glad that we're talking about this. I've talked about this on the show several times. First of all, I love therapy. I know I told you at the beginning both my parents are licensed psychologists. So therapy has been this incredible resource for me throughout several different seasons of life. But in the last couple of years, one of the things that I've spent a lot of time talking about is friendship.

And I think it's because I was having a lot of anxiety surrounding my friendships. And I'm like, "Where does this come from?" My friendships, especially now in the

last, you know, 10 years are deep and true and lasting and really healthy. Like I have just really, really good friends, but I haven't always.

So there are things where, you know, I would find myself reacting more strongly to a situation or having a lot of fears that had nothing to do with actual relationship at hand. And that was one of the things that I spent a lot of time talking about in therapy, like, "Why am I reacting this way? And then how do I stop reacting this way?" Because I could see it harming my friendships or at least harming me. There was so much swirling in me whether or not it made it out to my like... even if I was able to protect my friends from it, it still was happening within me. And it made life really hard. And so I was really grateful for that help.

**Dr. Marisa:** It is super painful. It can feel like you're just like an open nerve trying to navigate relationships.

**Stephanie:** Yes, yes. One of the things that I know we're dealing with, especially as adults, and I would love to know anything you know about this. But one of the things that we're dealing with is that we don't have as many friends as we would like to have. Tell me anything you know about quantity of relationships, you know, maybe over time, or what is normal or what's best for us, and then any advice you have for making new friends.

**Dr. Marisa:** So what is normal changes throughout our lifespan. In our 20s, young 20s, we tend to have the most friends. We also tend to be friends with people that are more looser connections, they're kind of different from us. That's because in that time and that age we're really seeking to expand our sense of self and figure out our identities. So interacting with all these different types of friends really helps us experiment with different identities for ourselves.

But over time, what happens is as we get older we start thinking about how much time do we have left? And then I really want to spend it with people I feel really close to, with those deep, quality connections. So as we're older, we tend to shed friendships and focus more in quality over quantity. And that actually benefits us. We tend to experience more satisfaction in our friendships when that happens. But you know, that's just because our priorities and values differs depending on our age. So again, what's appropriate or what we might enjoy in our friendships can really change over time. And it's normal for that to happen.

It's also normal for friends to ebb and flow and come and go across the lifespan. Every seven years, one study found, we lose half our friends. So expect that there's going to be people that you thought were going to be in your life forever that are not going to be and that you're not the only one going through that. And a lot of people are going through that.

What that means is if in every seven years we lose half our friends, we better learn how to make friends, right? Because even if it's not happening now, it might happen in the next seven years. So what I want to tell people to really make friends, first of all, I want to disabuse people of the idea that friendships happen organically, because in adulthood, a lot of the times they don't.

When we're children we have what sociologists Rebecca Adams calls the essential ingredients for organic friendship, continuous unplanned interaction, and shared vulnerability. That's school, gym, recess, lunch. But as adults, I mean, we might see our colleagues every day, but we're not necessarily being vulnerable with them. Like these norms around professionalism mean that we're not being vulnerable and we don't have the same infrastructure for friendship.

So if we rely on that same concept of how friendship works in adulthood, we're going to be lonely. And this is backed by one study that found that people that see friendship as based on luck are lonelier overtime, whereas those that see it happening based on effort are less lonely over time.

So you have to try. You have to initiate. Like don't just wait for people to come to you. Don't be passive about this, the one of the most important things in your life, for your mental health, for your physical health, for your sense of who you are. Like, don't just like wait. Don't just wait. You're going to have to initiate. I know, that's scary. But I've told you assume people like you. I've told you about the likely gap. People are less likely to reject you than you think.

So if you want to make your first friend, two paths that I suggest. One, reaching out to people to reconnect. A lot of us have people we'd love to have stay connected to but we didn't just because we got busy. And the research finds that when we send that text to reconnect, people like it more than we think. They appreciate it more than we assume. So you may be thinking, "They don't want to hear from me." But from the research, they're probably more likely to want to hear from you than you think.

But the other way that I would say is joining a hobby that you can pursue in community that's repeated over time. Because this capitalizes on something called the mere exposure effect, which is our tendency to like people the more we've been exposed to them. It's completely unconscious.

These researchers had people in a psychology lecture and they planted women into the psychology lecture. And they found the end of the semester people liked the woman that showed up to the most lectures 20% more than the woman that didn't

show up for any. But nobody remembered any of these women. So it's completely unconscious, right? Yeah, it's wild.

So what that tells us is when we first interact with people, your exposure hasn't set in. We're going to be weary. It's going to be awkward. We're going to be mistrusting. That's not a sign that Oh, I need to jump ship. I shouldn't be part of this group anymore. It's a sign that hey, you're a part of the trajectory of friendship. That's the first stage. Awkward, weary, you know, hard, difficult.

And then trusting that "Oh, but it will get easier over time. Your exposure effect will set in: I'll like them more, they'll like me more. But not only that. When you become part of the social group, you've overcome something called overt avoidance, which is our tendency to avoid interaction because we're scared.

But you might still be engaging in something called covert avoidance, which is our tendency to show up physically but check out mentally. And that looks like I joined this hiking group or this walking club, but I'm always on my phone or I'm talking to the one person that I already know.

So you have to overcome that covert avoidance by saying to someone, "Hey, my name is Marisa. How have you liked this group?" Like showing interest in other people. I think often we have this misconception that to be likable I need to be funny, I need to be smart, I need to be charismatic. But in fact, people report that that's the least important trait in friends—someone who's entertaining.

The most important they value is someone who makes them feel valued and makes them feel like they matter. So theory of inferred attraction—thrown out this jargon—it's basically the idea that people like people that they think like them. So if you want to make friends, it's about making other people feel loved and making other people feel like they belong.

**Stephanie:** My mind is blown because these are so many things that I've wondered about or I thought were true. I think I might see a pattern here and you're like, "Nope, that's real and scientifically proven." I'm fascinated. I'm about to go do so much reading after this.

You said something back when you're first talking about making new friends and you said something about a gap. But I didn't recognize that phrase. Explain that to us one more time.

**Dr. Marisa:** It's called the liking gap. And it's the finding that when people interact with someone and predict how alike they are, people underestimate how alike they are.

**Stephanie:** Okay. Okay. That's crazy. It's crazy. All of this is really pointing to the fact that we really are our own worst critics. If we could do a side-by-side comparison, like a TV show or something of what a scenario looks like through our eyes, and then what it looks like through someone else's eyes, our version should be like dark and grainy and have like sad, mean music. Music could be mean, you know? And everyone else is like, "I think that'd be great."

**Dr. Marisa:** Yeah, right? It's like we all have this horror movie ready to get our heads for how life is going.

**Stephanie:** Totally. And everyone else is like, "No, I thought I was great." So that's making new friends. I need tips for going deeper with our friends. Because I know I've been in situations where I have a lot of people around and I'm still lonely. I think a lot of us have felt that. So what about that?

**Dr. Marisa:** Yeah, great question. So loneliness comes from not having the social connection you want, which can come from being isolated from people. But I also see inauthenticity as a form of loneliness when you feel like you can't be your authentic self around people. And it's really those quality connections that protect us against loneliness the most. Not just being around people but feeling that depth and that sense of being really understood.

And I think one of the best ways to do this in friendship is to just let ourselves be a little bit more vulnerable. Like we have this misconception that vulnerability makes us weak or people will exploit us when our vulnerable use it against us, right? But in fact, the research finds that when people are more vulnerable, they're liked more. And that, again, this negativity bias called the beautiful mess effect, that when people judge other people's vulnerability, they see it pretty positively, but when they judge their own, they see it negatively.

So again, we're missing predicting the value of vulnerability. But people that are more vulnerable too, like people that express negative emotions actually make more friends over time, which is interesting. So I think bringing a little bit more vulnerability, like sharing a little bit about what you're struggling with, if you've been interacting with someone for a while but don't feel like you've actually gotten to know them, I think that can be really important and really bonding.

I will say the other thing that I suggest is expressing affection for people and showing them that you like and value them. The reason being that when people decide... according to risk regulation theory, which I mentioned earlier, we decide how much to invest in a relationship based on our prediction of how likely we are to get rejected.

So if we think we'll be rejected, we're not going to invest. When you express affection towards someone, and you tell them how great they are, which I have tried to do more often, just tell people like, "You know, You have great energy. I've really enjoyed this conversation." Because according to the research, again, people appreciate that more than we think and it's less awkward than we think.

What you're telling them is, you're not going to be rejected if you try to invest here. And that fear of rejection is one of the biggest barriers to friendships. So the more that you can convey that people won't be rejected when they interact with you, the more that they are going to want to invest in a deeper friendship with you.

**Stephanie:** You're a safe person.

**Dr. Marisa:** Exactly. Yeah.

**Stephanie:** That's really beautiful. Seriously there's so much. I'm like, I'm gonna have to go listen through this again and again. I want to ask you just one more big thing before we close out. I think we all have this idea of you know... When we're imagining what our ideal friendship scenarios are, I think for a lot of us, we're imagining or hoping for lifelong friends. Do you have any tips or is there any research on... not duration of friendships necessarily, but like how to make a friendship last?

**Dr. Marisa:** Yeah. This is a great question. I think about defining friendship and how important that is. Because I think sometimes our view on friendship to me is good company and not a good friend. Good company to me is someone whose company I enjoy. I like them as a person. But that is not a good friend. A friendship is an investment and it is a commitment to another person.

If I'm a good friend to someone, if they're a good friend to me, I'm showing up in their times of need. I'm trying to support them. I'm rooting for them to succeed. I'm trying to help them live a better life. I'm trying to be a steward for them living the life that they really want. I'm trying not to judge them when they have a concern. I'm open to figuring out how I can get their needs met, while also attending to my own, of course. So it's an investment and it's a commitment.

And I think if we think friendship is just good company, we're not going to initiate, we're not going to invest, we're not going to make an effort. And fundamentally, our friendships are going to reflect that. Like people aren't going to feel as close to us, we're not going to feel as close to them.

It's work. I am implying that friendship is work, I also am implying that friendships absolutely worth it and it's going to change your life and it's going to feel beautiful, meaningful and profound. That if you are someone who doesn't have friends and

thinks you don't need them, that we have this other bias wherein when we predict how much how good friendship feels before we're actually engaging with that relationship, we tend to underestimate how much will benefit from it and how much joy we'll have from it.

So I would suggest that we have the sense of friendship that requires effort, that requires an investment that requires intentionality. Instead of just seeing it as good vibes only, always easy, taking no work, right? Because imagine if you had that script for your marriage. How far would it go? How long would it last?

**Stephanie:** Like three days maybe.

**Dr. Marisa:** Yeah, exactly. Like, "Okay, you're not calling me back? Okay, goodbye." Anyway. That desire, that commitment, that mindset I think is really key for keeping our friendships over time.

**Stephanie:** Yeah, yeah. I really like that. Marisa, do you have just any last encouragement for women who are sitting here going, "I want this? I'm still feeling intimidated, I'm still feeling overwhelmed but I want this." I'd love just any last encouragement you have for them."

**Dr. Marisa:** So my niece told me when she read the book, Angelica, she said, "For friendship to happen, someone has to be brave." So be brave.

**Stephanie:** I love that. Thank you so much for the work that you've done. This is profound. This is important. This is life-changing, honestly. And just really thanks for making the time to come on the show. I appreciate it.

**Dr. Marisa:** It was my pleasure, Stephanie. Thanks so much for having me.

[00:57:34] <music>

**Outro:** You guys, isn't Marisa amazing? I love her and I love this conversation, and I am so happy I got to share it with you.

One thing I wanted to mention quickly is I know we talked about a lot in today's episode. And so if you want to find the links to any of those things, all you have to do is go to my website. It's [girlsnightpodcast.com](http://girlsnightpodcast.com). And for every episode, we have a blog post with the show notes. All the links will be there for everything we talked about, including all of Marisa's contact info, so you can follow her and so that y'all can be friends.

The other thing I wanted to mention is that if you haven't had a chance yet, it would mean so much to me if you would take just a second to leave us a rating and a review on iTunes. We've gotten so many amazing five-star reviews from y'all. And you've left the sweetest comments. I can't tell you how much it means to me. And it also helps out the show more than you can imagine.

So, if you haven't, please take just one second to leave us a rating and a review. Thanks so much. All right, friends, that's all we have for today, but we'll be back next week with another episode of Girls Night. I'll see you then.