

# relationships

and stunned. I couldn't understand where this had come from. People say I'm 'the funny one' in the group and that's who I am - I didn't change who I was and yet who I was started to annoy her. I think she took issue with the fact that I'm quite bubbly and that she's not a very happy person and is quite insular - but I don't think it gives her the right to put me down. Now, I only see her down home sometimes in the local and we'll stop and exchange small talk, but I don't want someone who makes me feel bad about who I am in my life, thanks."

## Work and play - the boundaries

In Ann-marie's case, the breakdown of the friendship started because she worked in the same field as her friend, but got ahead. Dr Keers says that when friends work together or in the same industry, it can create competitiveness in a friendship. "It is probably unrealistic that just because women have struggled hard to succeed in the workplace that we should expect them to have some unspoken solidarity and sense of 'sisterhood,'" says Dr Keers.

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"When we're talking about people and friendships, the boundaries between work and friendship can become blurred. Relationships become more complex and people's individual experiences and their feelings in response to them can complicate things."

On the whole, this makes for very depressing reading. At the same time, it's often not just about careerism or feeling that someone is doing better than you: it's not even about good ol' Irish begrudgery, even if everyone probably has one friend who can't bring herself to ask about your new job/house/man. The concept of sisterhood can seem very far away when women can't pat each other on the back for achievements and really mean it.

Another weird aspect to all of this is that the people who are most likely to have a problem with you are the friends that, on paper, seem most similar to you. This can be a reality, or someone who just likes to think they're very like you. Dr Keers says: "Unconsciously as adults, we try to resolve unresolved conflict experienced in childhood. For instance feeling inferior as a child leads to a deep need to redress this balance as an adult and feel at least 'as

good as.' If we unconsciously play out the same dynamics in adult relationships, it can explain why we may be drawn to form friendships with people who have qualities that we would like to possess."

## Mirror mirror?

A friend is supposedly a good mirror because we choose the friends in our life based on common interests or because they have qualities we have, or would like to have. These same qualities - being driven or opinionated as in the cases above - can flip over into things that irritate someone, who perhaps would like to embody those qualities themselves. Again, I'm confused - why, oh why do women who seem to have so much great stuff going on, feel jealous about friends who care about them?

Dr Keers feels that the problem has its roots in insecurity: "When one person feels the need to put another down, it is invariably because this person feels lacking, inferior, self-critical and unhappy with themselves. If they

felt entirely satisfied with themselves, they'd have no need to compare or begrudge their friend happiness or success. If a person is feeling unhappy, constantly criticising themselves and telling themselves they are not good enough, it can become more and more unbearable to see a friend who, with apparent ease, can achieve all the things that you dream of.

"This leads to a spiral of more self-criticism and feelings of worthlessness which is perhaps then acted out by undermining a friend, being unable to express happiness at their success and withdrawing. Unfortunately, very often the person who is on the receiving end, because of their own insecurity, will take it on-board, feel undermined and start wondering 'what have I done wrong, what is wrong with me, is this my fault?' etc, leading to very painful feelings of anger and depression rather than having strong boundaries to realise that this is NOT their issue and perhaps losing the ability to stand back and gain perspective. This kind of thing may seem more apparent in female relationships because of the emotional intensity of these relationships."


## Patch up Vs purge

I had a similar experience to that of Anne-Marie and Ciara and it was a drawn out one that was so exhausting and upsetting that with hindsight, I should have walked away sooner. It's difficult to comprehend why someone wants to sabotage one of their close friendships. I later found out this person had done this with other people and her problems seemed rooted in an insecurity that was nothing to do with me, or anyone else.

My initial, and long-term reaction was one of sympathy but if someone constantly projects their issues on to you, it's best to leave them to their negativity and live your own life the way you want to. The thing to do ladies, is to ask yourself if you've really done anything to upset your mate and if it you haven't, confront her about why she is responding to you in such an unfair way. Friendships are such a fulfilling part of our lives and most scraps between close friends are usually quite fixable.

If someone's been in your life for a long time, you both owe it to each other to try and work things out. Everyone has faults and good friends should be able to see beyond the fact that you're vain or you're a bit forgetful. That you're too loud in public places or that you're opinionated.

There's an old Irish proverb (indulge the cheesiness, please) that states that a good friend is 'found treasure.' True. But when things start to go wrong, it can be hard to let a friendship go. If you've tried to sort things out, particularly when you're on the receiving end of the cold shoulder and hurtful jibes, it's best to walk away. It's hard enough to hold your head up with confidence most of the time without getting it in the neck from someone you once held in high regard.

And this is why it hurts so much - because you once loved the crazy cow to bits. Life is a lonely journey made easier by people who care for us, but if they don't have anything good to say, it may only drag you down and dent your confidence. So if one of your friendships is in this state, patch it up or purge the source of put-downs and be happy knowing you'll make more friends in the future, who'll love you for everything you are - unconditionally. 

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