

Edited introduction

Women value friendships. We cherish them and want them to last. We depend on our friends for love, support, fun, guidance, and companionship. They give us a reliable support network in times of distress. We look to our friends to interpret the big picture for us and help us find solutions to problems that overwhelm us. We trust them with our secrets and take their advice. Our girlfriends have the privilege of knowing some of the most intimate details of our lives. Good friendships are vital for mental and emotional well-being: so much so that women with strong female relationships in their lives are likely to live longer than those without. In one Australian study, participants with solid friend groups were 22% more likely to live longer.

This natural tendency towards treasuring female friendships is constantly reflected in the media: shows like *Sex and the City*, *The Golden Girls*, *90210*, *Gossip Girl*, *The Bold Type*, and *The OC* all revolve around female camaraderie. These shows are made for and marketed to women for a reason. It's fun to sit around with your girls and debate over who's the Carrie, Charlotte, Miranda or Samantha in your group. It's uplifting to see women supporting each other and finding comfort in their BFFs rather than their boyfriends.

Women of my generation delay marriage and children, choosing school, work, and travel over traditional family-building domesticity. This gives us the time and freedom to find and build strong friendships; studies show that single people rely heavily on their friends. If we are single, and our family doesn't live nearby, our friends become our family. When we do find ourselves in a romantic relationship, our friendships may outlast it: the average length of marriage in the United States is seven years. Many people have friendships that span decades. Is it any wonder, then, that women are more likely to dump a bad boyfriend than a bad friend?

In college, I would tell my then-BFF, Angie, that our friendship was one reason I didn't feel the need to have a romantic relationship with someone. She filled part of that void. Not the romantic or physical aspect, but the rest of it. Angie helped repair my broken heart over a breakup, helped me achieve my career dreams, gave me networking advice and encouraged me to join meetups when I relocated to another state and knew no one, and gave me critical input on situations in my life. When we were long-distance friends, Angie and I would talk every day on the phone for hours. How was that any different than a long-distance love relationship?

Of course, there *are* differences between romantic relationships and friendships. An interesting difference I've noticed is that women will put up with things from their BFFs that they would never tolerate in a significant other. Why is this? If you wouldn't allow your romantic partner to treat you poorly, why would you allow the same behavior from a friend - especially someone who is supposed to be your BFF? If you had a friend whose husband emotionally abused her, would you tell her to stay? Can you imagine if she stayed married to him for ten years? Twenty years? If you wouldn't expect her to stay with an abusive spouse, then why do you expect yourself to stay with an abusive friend? All those shows about fun and idyllic girl friend groups can sometimes illuminate a darker side of platonic female relationships. Think of the "friendship/competition" ongoing between Paris and Rory in *Gilmore Girls*. In *Pretty Little Liars*, Allison was known for making her "friends" lives difficult. Think of the betrayal Brenda felt when

Kelly stole Dylan, or the love triangle between Peyton, Lucas, and Brooke. Sometimes your BFF is the person who hurts you the most.

In many ways, your BFF is your soulmate. She *gets* you. You can tell her anything and be yourself around her. You tell her your dreams, hopes, fears, insecurities and secrets. She makes you laugh, is fun to be around. She's empathetic and nice. You have weird inside jokes, leave each other long voicemails, and text each other non-stop. It seems like the lunch dates, long conversations at Starbucks, and the laughter will never end. You have long nights out that turn into even longer mornings, reliving every moment over breakfast. You would give your life for her and assume she feels the same.

You love her.

Which makes it that much harder to believe it when you discover that she doesn't stick up for you when you're not around, shares your secrets, befriends your enemies and exes, and trashes you behind your back.

Original Introduction

Women's Friendships: A Taboo Breakup

In many ways your BFF is your soulmate- your significant other. She gets you. You love her. You can be yourself with her and tell her anything. You share your dreams, hopes, feelings, and everything under the sun with her. She makes you laugh, is fun to be around, empathetic, and nice. You have weird inside jokes, leave each other long voicemails, and text each other nonstop. She knows your insecurities, fears, and thoughts that you've never shared with anyone. It seems like the lunch dates, long conversations at Starbucks, and the laughter will never end. You have long nights out that turn into even longer mornings over breakfast, reliving every moment and analyzing every detail. You would give your life for her and assume she feels the same way about you. Which makes it all the harder to believe she trashes you behind your back, shares your secrets, befriends your enemies, friends your exes on Facebook, and won't stick up for you.

Women value friendships. They cherish them and want them to last. Friends play an important part in our lives. We depend on them for love, support, fun, guidance, and companionship. Good friendships are vital for mental and emotional well-being. They give us a reliable support network in times of distress. Whether it's the confidence, the companionship, or the sharing- women place a lot of importance in female friendships. We look to our friends to interpret the big picture for us and help us find solutions to problems that overwhelm us. We trust them with our secrets and take their advice. Our girlfriends have the privilege of knowing some of the most intimate details of our lives. And doesn't it feel great to be surrounded by someone who has your back? But what do you do when your BFF is no longer your cheerleader? No longer has your back? What do you do when a friendship, which should be positive and give you happiness, does nothing but hurt you and bring you pain?

TV shows portray female friendships as the be all end all. Think "Sex and the City", "Friends", "90210", "Gossip Girl", "The Bold Type", and "The OC". Many shows portray female

camaraderie. The Thelma to your Louise. The Ethel to your Lucy. The Trixie to your Alice. The Wilma to your Betty. Every leading female always had her female side kick. She may not have had a boyfriend, but she has her faithful female companion. And you know what? They are- if they work right. And it's fun to aspire to friendships like that, but is that realistic? While it's fun to sit with your girls and debate over who's the Carrie, Charlotte, and Samantha in your group- how many of us really have friendships like that? Think of the "friendship/competition" ongoing between Paris and Rory. Even Serena and Blair had issues in season 1. In *Pretty Little Liars*, Allison was known for making her "friends" lives difficult. Think of the betrayal Brenda felt when her BFF Kelly stole Dylan. Or what about the love triangle between Peyton, Lucas, and Brooke? Sometimes the one that hurts you the most is your BFF.

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Unlike previous generations, we've delayed marriage and children, worked, travelled, and along the way, collected friends in a way that most of our mothers never did. Studies show that single individuals rely even more heavily on their friends. If we are single, and our family doesn't live nearby, our friends become our family. With people marrying later in life, or not at all- it might be the closest relationship we have. Women with strong female relationships in their lives are likely to live longer than those without. A 10-year-long Australian study showed that participants with solid friend groups were 22% more likely to live longer.

A bad friendship doesn't start off bad. Initially, your BF was a BFF. Your friendship was exciting and fun. She was charming, attentive, loving, and caring. After all, she needed to win your love and trust somehow. But somehow it's now become toxic and bad.

Women are more likely to dump a bad boyfriend or a husband, than a bad friend. Why is this? Why do people tolerate behavior from friends that they would never tolerate from a partner? Why do we stay with a friend that treats us poorly? Think of it in terms of a romantic relationship- I often compare the two. Would you put up with this type of behavior from a spouse? Then why would you with a friend? If you wouldn't tolerate this negative behavior in a romantic relationship, then why do you tolerate it in a friendship? Especially someone who is supposed to be your BFF.

If you had a friend whose husband emotionally and mentally abused her would you tell her to stay? Can you imagine if she stayed married to him for ten years? 20 years? If you wouldn't

expect her to stay with an abusive spouse, then why do you want to stay with an abusive friend? Why do you expect yourself to?

In college, I would tell my then BFF, Angie, that one reason I DIDN'T feel the need to have a romantic relationship with someone was that I had her. She filled part of that void. Obviously, not the romantic and the physical aspect, but she filled the rest of it. How was my friendship with her different than that of a long-time romantic partner? Lots are no longer physical or having sex after many years. Most turn into companionship after time. When I was away at college, Angie and I would talk every day on the phone for hours. How is that any different than how a long-distance love relationship would be?

My friend, Angie, also someone I considered a BFF at times during the past few decades, was a GF. She:

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But these shows can sometimes illuminate a darker side of female friendships. Think of the "friendship/competition" ongoing between Paris and Rory in *Gilmore Girls*. In *Pretty Little Liars*, Allison was known for making her "friends" lives difficult. Think of the betrayal Brenda felt when her BFF Kelly stole Dylan. Or what about the love triangle between Peyton, Lucas, and Brooke? Sometimes the one that hurts you the most is your BFF. And doesn't it feel great to be surrounded by someone who has your back? In your friend group, your BFF should be the head cheerleader. She's the one you rely on even if everyone else drifts away. But what do you do when your BFF is no longer your cheerleader? No longer has your back? What do you do when a friendship, which should be positive and give you happiness, does nothing but hurt you and bring you pain?

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If you had a friend whose husband emotionally and mentally abused her, would you tell her to stay? -Can you imagine if she stayed married to him for ten years? -20 years Twenty years? -If you wouldn't expect her to stay with an abusive spouse, then why do you want to expect yourself to stay with an abusive friend? -Why do you expect yourself to? All those shows about fun and idyllic girl friend groups can sometimes illuminate a darker side of platonic female relationships. Think of the "friendship/competition" ongoing between Paris and Rory in *Gilmore Girls*. In *Pretty Little Liars*, Allison was known for making her "friends" lives difficult. Think of the betrayal Brenda felt when Kelly stole Dylan, or the love triangle between Peyton, Lucas, and Brooke. Sometimes your BFF is the person who hurts you the most.

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In most cases, friendships last longer than marriages. According to several websites the average length of marriage in the United States is seven years.

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