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LAVERNE COX IS A WOMAN AND I AM A JEW

Ever since the writer
converted to Judaism,
she's been told she's not
a real Jew. Does this
identity disparagement
sound familiar?

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The first time I saw a rabbi about my irrational but persistent feeling that I needed to convert to Judaism, she told me that according to Jewish tradition, the souls of every still-unborn Jew—i.e., Golda Meir, Barbra Streisand, Natalie Portman, the rabbi herself, *and* all future converts (possibly including moi)—were at Mount Sinai when God gave the Torah to the children of Israel. I was touched. I wasn't sure I could get behind the concept of a Jewish Wayback Machine, but it was encouraging to learn that the tradition was that inclusive.

This was helpful to remember later on when various thoughtless, presumptuous people felt it imperative to tell me that they didn't quite count as Jews by choice to be A-list members of the tribe. At a synagogue dinner shortly after my conversion, someone ragged on me for ordering the vegetarian c



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Laverne Cox Is a Woman and I Am a Jew | Dame Magazine

How can you be a Jew?" she wondered, apparently assuming I had also converted to chicken soup and brisket. This stuff still happens 15 years later. I'm now dating a "real Jew" or, you know, a Jew.

The other (kind of) Jew I dated was a Jew by choice. I had a delicious fling with a woman in another city who at some point during our affair offhandedly described herself as a butch. It was news to me. She was cute and tiny, with lots of long blue hair, and I pretty much perceived her as an art punk ... but hey, whatever. Eventually she and I went our separate ways. We remained friends, however, and I tried to see her when I was in her town.

Lindsay Van Gelder (<https://www.damemagazine.com/author/lindsay-van-gelder/>)
Jun 9, 2014

One day, she told me that she was going to a support group for people who were thinking of transitioning. She confessed she wasn't a butch after all; felt like a female impersonator, and was exploring how to integrate a deep, pervasive, interior sense of maleness into her life.

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Cut to the present. My friend is now a guy named Asher. I thought of him recently after the *National Review* published internet troll provocateur K.D. Williamson's rant entitled "Laverne Cox Is Not a Woman," (<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/379188/laverne-cox-not-woman-k-d-williamson>) aiming his target at the transgender star of *Orange Is the New Black*, after Cox appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine (<https://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/>). Williamson insisted on using male pronouns throughout the article, calling Cox an "effigy" of femaleness, and nattered on about how we're all being forced to "treat delusion as fact" by recognizing the new genders of Cox and other trans people.

One can laugh at PC rigidity, and sometimes I also do just that. Over the years I've rolled my eyes at New Age hippies who "feel" like they're Native American. I've also resisted using honorific female pronouns for drag queens who resume their male personas after they finish performing and can take

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much more pleasant late-night subway ride home than I can. But I have c
to believe that there's a big difference between a whim or a costume and a
hard-fought

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I toyed with the idea of Jewishness-as-identity for years. It seemed crazy f
middle-aged WASP who wasn't marrying a Jew (been there, done that) ar
who was ambivalent about organized religion in general to be convinced
nonetheless that somehow this was where I *belonged*. But I was convince
had even done a massive atavistic genealogical search of my family after a
friend of mine—a woman who was married to a rabbi who converted peo
told me that people like me often ultimately discovered that they had a hi
Jewish grandparent or great grandparent. (I found out that not only do I
Jewish DNA, but that I'm probably descended from the kings who kicked
Jews out of England and France.)

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Becoming a Jew is a hassle. In the old days when Jews were vulnerable to
accusations of proselytizing Christians away from the "True Church," it
standard procedure to test a potential convert's commitment by turning h
away three times. Nowadays the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructi
branches have a pan-denominational drill that usually lasts at least a year
study, going both to organized classes and one-on-one sessions with a rab
You're encouraged to attend synagogue, celebrate the Jewish holidays, sla
mezuzah on the doorpost, light candles on Friday night, and otherwise liv
Jewish life. If you're a man, you have to undergo circumcision or a symbo
pinprick of the penis. You choose a Hebrew name. On the big day, you're
required to get naked—no rings or even nail polish—and go through a re
ritual in a body of living water deep enough to roll around in. (I did mine
dawn in the ocean off Miami Beach, trying to keep my butt from bobbing
above the waterline for the amusement of the tourists on the boardwalk.)
you have to go before a special court that grills you about your knowledg
your motives.

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But all of this is a walk in the park compared to changing your gender. (I mention that even if I could have simply signed on the dotted line and got some sort of quickie Reno conversion, my new status would be protected the law. Transgender status usually is not.)

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I had met a few trans people before Asher was on the cusp, but he was the person who welcomed all of my nosy questions. No facet and no possible motive for his journey were off-limits. I learned about the sexual jolt of testosterone, and how it can make those whose bodies it's coursing through like dicks, even if they don't necessarily have one. He told me about his feelings from the physical side effects of hormones and surgery to possibly never finding a woman who would love his new self.

Asher was also the first person I knew who was on the road from female to male, and as a feminist, I was more dodgy with that than about the opposite route down the highway. But I already knew that Asher was a feminist, too, and that he certainly wasn't afraid of being openly queer. He saw his transition through that prism even as he had new experiences, like male bonding. He did not equate masculinity with power or dominance. But as he began to dress as a man, cut his hair short, strap down his breasts, and take hormones that grew his muscles and narrowed his hips, he realized, even at five-foot-two, that he was already reaping the benefits of male privilege every time he walked down the street without feeling like a target.

But ultimately, his maleness, he once told me "is just something that is." He had a profound conviction that the male gender was where *he* belonged, and whatever it took to get there was worth it. All the rest was commentary.

Accusing someone of not being a woman (or a man, or a Jew, or anything else) after she's busted her butt for years to earn that status is as stupid as refusing to recognize that someone you knew in fourth grade who has since gone to medical school now gets to be addressed as doctor. We *are* the people we've struggled and sweated to become. As at Sinai, maybe where we end up is where we were destined to be, or at least should be respected as such. It's not a delusion. If anything, it's a delusion of grandeur to insist otherwise.

In fact, to insist otherwise is to be—as my people say—a *schmuck*.

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About the Author

Lindsay Van Gelder is a San Diego-based writer whose work has regularly appeared in Allure, Ms. Magazine, among many other national publications.

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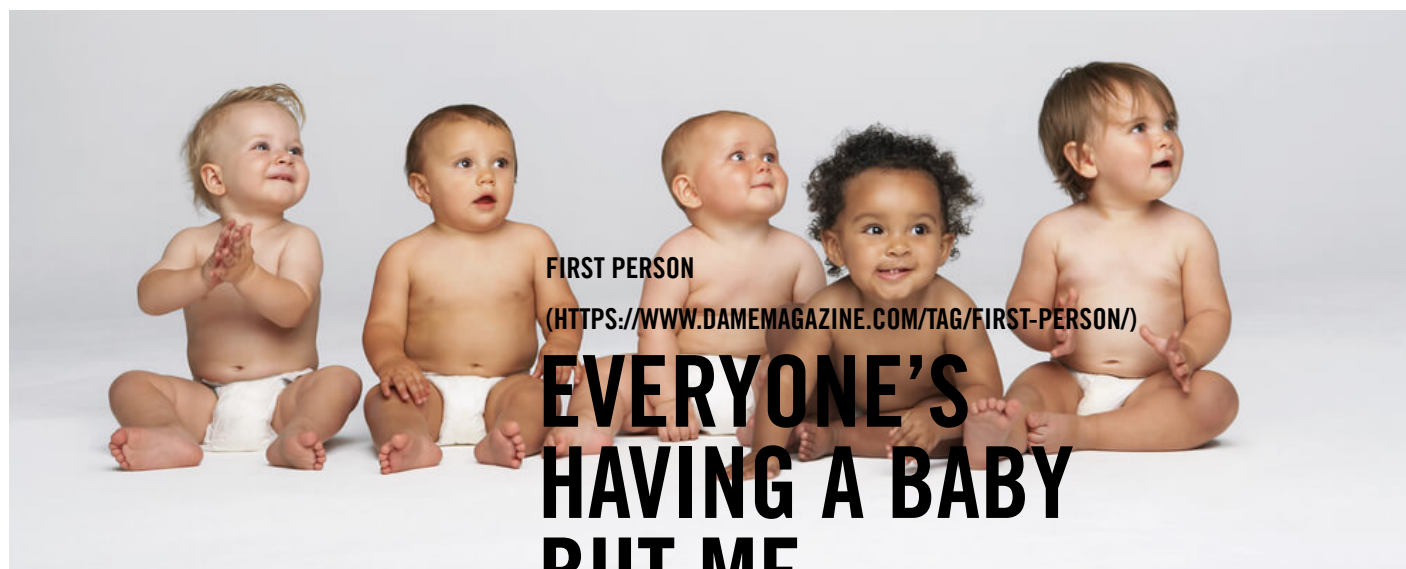
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Father's Day is here,
and once again, my
husband and I remain
childless.

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When my mother delivered me, she pushed so hard that she burst
every blood vessel in both eyeballs.

/06/05/everyone-having-baby-me/) [↗](#)
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I think about that—and about other stories I’ve heard from friends and families of emergency C-sections and 40-hour deliveries, of weeks of bedrest, more fatigue and stress, withdrawing from social life in order to prepare for the new life and the new life you will have as a result—whenever I get pregnant” pang. It’s my conciliatory schadenfreude.

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[t](https://twitter.com/damemagazine) (https://twitter.com/damemagazine) Last month, I might have celebrated my first Mother’s Day; this week, my husband might have celebrated his first Father’s Day.
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Me&body=https://www.damemagazine.com/2014/06/05/everyone-having-baby-me/) [↗](#) (https://www.damemagazine.com/2014/06/05/everyone-having-baby-me/) On a Saturday last July, as my husband, Ross, and I drank beers on our feet stooped and looked out at children playing in the park across the street, we talked about having kids of our own. I was having my annual pap smear days later and we agreed that I would ask the midwife performing my annual exam what I needed to do to start preparing my body for a healthy pregnancy and an easy delivery. The idea was that my next visit to her office would be a prenatal check-up, not an annual exam.

Jillian Ashley Blair Ivey (https://www.damemagazine.com/author/jillian-ashley/) Jun 5, 2014

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Instead, I left that appointment and began a journey (which I wrote about in an essay entitled “Botox Saved My Sex Life” (https://www.damemagazine.com/2014/03/26/botox-saved-my-sex-life)) that would include a very frank discussion with a pelvic floor specialist that would include the words: “You cannot get pregnant.” I have several friends who have struggled—often quite publicly (http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2008/12/03/nobody-loves-my-200-baby.html)—with their infertility or that of their partners, so I feel that I should clarify here. The doctor did not mean that I couldn’t *ever* get pregnant (my fertility status is still TBD—one thing at a time), just that for the duration of my treatment, be it six months or three years, I was not *allowed* to get pregnant. The multiple prescriptions and invasive treatments could cause defects or miscarriage, and that meant that the very feeble plans my husband and I had just made would have to wait.

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After a few days of crying about it (which happened to coincide with Day Oz's on-air pregnancy announcement (<http://abc.go.com/shows/the-chew/news/full-reports/2014/06/14/abc-oz-pregnant/>))—that was a particularly bad thing to get back to work of obsessing about it, I became more comfortable with the idea of, my situation. After a few months, it became my everyday reality. I take my two pills and use my three ointments and insert my suppositories, all on a schedule so completely that I've had to create a calendar for my medicine cabinet, with the hope that someday my doctor will tell me that I can stop.

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Over the past two months, at least a half-dozen of my friends have announced their pregnancies, and another half-dozen became the proud parents of beautiful newborns. Both groups have posted the Facebook photos to prove it. With each of these posts, the reminder of what I do not, and at least for the time being cannot, have. Followed almost immediately by battling voices in my head, on the one hand scolding me for being so selfish, because there's still a chance that someday I will while other people I love will not; and on the other, telling me that there's no real hurry anyway. And in some regards, that second voice is the one I should be listening to: right now, I want to re-learn, that the miracle drug that is Botox, how to actually *enjoy* sex with my husband, I want to keep sleeping in on lazy Sundays. I want to keep doing the travel I should have done in my early twenties (I've been in five new countries in the past two years). I want to keep going to standing-room concerts, keep staying up late because I want to, keep (occasionally) drinking too much. I want to do all of the little projects around the house that we've been saying we would do since we bought it in 2010. And I want to keep the room in the house designated as my office, my office, rather than turning it into a nursery (which had been its purpose under the previous owners' occupation).

I am 30. I am the same age my mother was when she had me (and she was on the older side for a first-time parent in the early 1980s). Some days, I feel too young, too selfish to be a mother. But I also got my hackles up when a Facebook friend posted his opinion last month that to be a “real” mother you had to have done more than just giving birth to, or adopting and raising children, and continued to define the types of people whom *he felt* deserved to be called parents. Aside from taking issue with his statement on behalf of my friends who would have loved to have someone call them “Mom” or “Dad,” I realized that *I* would have loved to have someone to call me “Mom” at that moment, or at least to know that the day was not too far off.

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My friend Eve* calls me her “Jewish mother” because whenever she is having a bad day, I’ll invite her over for dinner (and make sure she takes home leftovers if there are any). I know that our dog thinks of my husband and me as “Daddy” and “Mommy,” because when my husband says: “Go see Mom” or I say to her: “Go see Daddy,” she always finds the right parent. (The “parent” issue was another my Facebook friend raised—but that’s another debate for another day.) When I’m driving with a passenger in my car and have to hit the breaks, the “mom arm” comes up involuntarily, even though it’s better for both me and my passenger if I just let the seatbelt do its job.

I do not have a child. I am not, cannot be, pregnant.

I am still, in many ways and to many people, a mother.

But for now, because pregnancy is verboten, I have decided to fill my time with things I won’t be able to do when I *am* pregnant, or that will be difficult as a parent. Wine club. Book club. Writers group. Bowling league. (My average age is 85. I didn’t say I had to be good at these things.) I held my crow pose (<http://www.theyogaposes.com/yoga-poses/yoga-crow-pose.php>) in yoga class for ten full seconds last month—a new record for me. I went outdoor rock climbing for the first time in my life, after taking up indoor version of the sport late last summer, and when it was time to descend, I trusted my friends as much as my harness enough that I let go of the stone wall to which I’d been clinging and swung, momentarily weightless, over my friends’ heads, the rough path on which they stood, and the gushing river behind them. My body, at that moment, was no one’s but my own. And I might not be able to say that for much longer.

About the Author

As Father’s Day looms, my husband and I still don’t know if we are ready to be parents. We don’t know if we will *ever* be “ready” to be parents. I don’t know if anyone truly is, or if it really matters. I know that I love the life we have

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Jillian Ashley Blair Ivey is a freelance writer, editor, and communications strategist in Philadelphia. In her free time, she enjoys cooking, walking her dog, and getting mad at the Internet. Follow her: @jillianivey

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together right now, with our four cats and our dog and our freedom to cc and go as we please, but also that I look at the photos of my beautiful pregnant friend, and find myself filled with a mix of anticipation, fear and excitement and dread and an unwillingness to let go, and the knowledge that I would give up anything for the child or children Ross and I do, someday, want to have. not—by circumstance but also, at the moment, by choice.

**Names are changed.*

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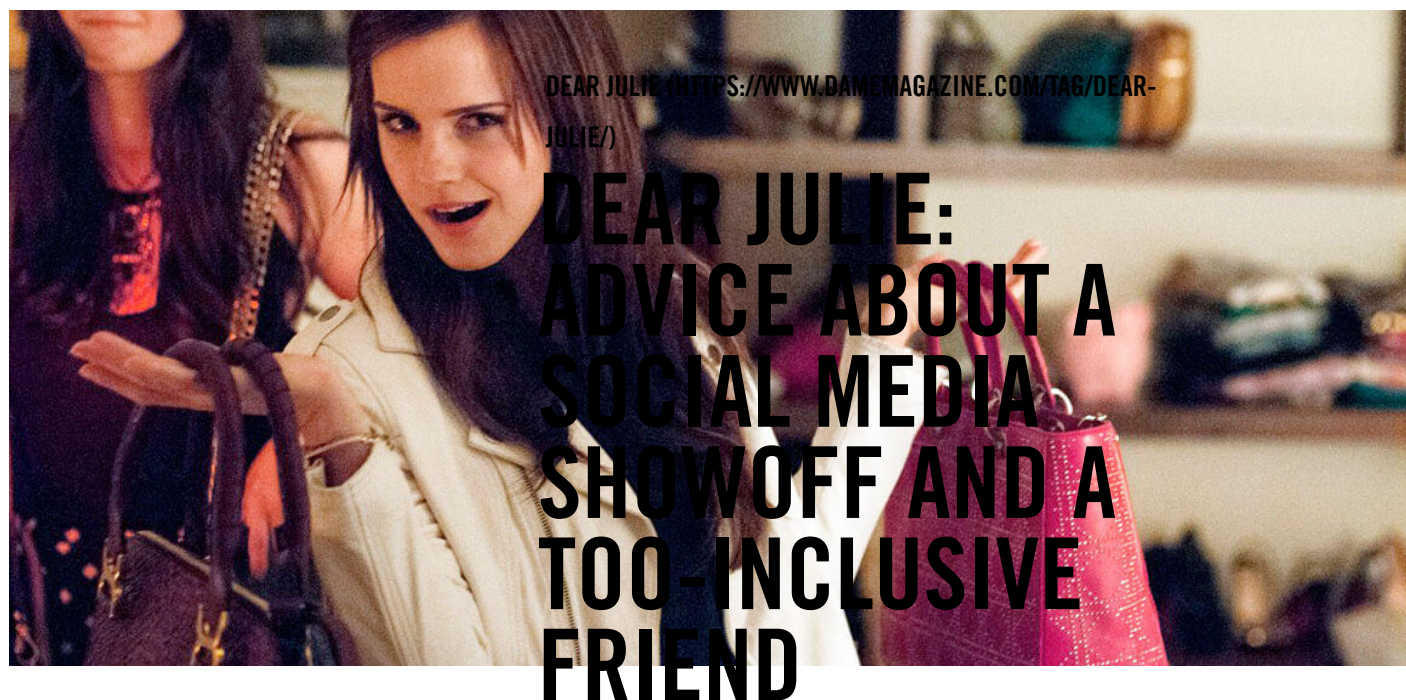
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DAME's Friendkeeper
helps a woman
understand a nice-IRL
pal who goes full brag
on the Internet, and
tells another how best

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Dear Julie,

DAME to request some one-on-one time with an invite-happy cohort.

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zine.com%2F2014%2F06%2F04%2Fdear-l-too-inclusive-friend%2F)  (mailto:?Media Showoff and a Too-Inclusive om/2014/06/04/dear-julie-advice-about-id/)  4/dear-julie-advice-about-social-media-

DA middle-school classmate and I have kept in touch all these years and I've always been glad that we're still friends. But lately, her Fac NEWS + ISSUES CULTURE SCIENCE PODCASTS a feeds have been getting on my nerves. They're almost if she buys, and it's starting to bug. A lot that our online ways match our offline ones, but why do have to post all her purchases (sometimes calling out how expensive they all the time? I know I can unhide **Log In / Login**) and **SUPPORT OUR WORK** but how do I focus on how she is in person (funny, nice) and not let her c persona shape my perceptions (<https://www.facebook.com/DAMEmagazine/>)

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Signed,

Ashamed for Being so Judgey

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Julie Klam (<https://www.damemagazine.com/author/julie-klam/>) Jun 4, 2014

The good news: You're not talking about me. Ha, ha! I kid because I'm b and because I'm broke I hate when other people have stuff that I want, ESPECIALLY if I deem them unworthy. Some of the reasons people are unworthy: They are younger, thinner, have better hair than me; they have earned the money for the stuff (trust fund or sugar daddy); and the list go Anyway, I kid...a little. Truthfully, who likes a braggart? Now I'm thinki the person I follow with the amazing beach house. I have not a beach ho and I really like the beach...a lot. And this weekend is supposed to be beautiful. What was the question? Oh, right, your show-offy friend. Oka Here's what I think. There are a few possible reasons why a person would constantly post photos of their new car, Birkin bag, iPhone 7v. One, beca they are not feeling so great about what they have that they can't show— you're happy and secure you don't usually sit around snapping selfies of new diamond studs. Or second possibility, they are rich among rich peop are clueless that everyone else doesn't have these things or do this too. Eit way, I don't think it ever comes from a place of self-awareness and inner

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so I tend to forgive that. The third possibility, and frankly this is frequent case more than not, some people don't know what to do on social media and they see a **NEWS + ISSUES** **CULTURE** **SCIENCE** **PODCASTS** things they've bought. I would cut her slack, and hi em like this is who she really is and you should stay f her you know in real life.

xx

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Julie



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Dear Julie,

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I've got this

deprecating-

set me up with her other friends—not to date, to be friends. Whenever I r

her for lunch she says, “Oh, I’m inviting Suzy, you have to meet her!” Ar

then Suzy comes and she’s all right but I never have time with my own fri

Also I wonder why she doesn’t seem to want to see me alone. I worry it’s

Am I too intense one on one? I am trying to figure it all out but the main

is I don’t like it. What do I do?

really like. She’s funny and smart and sel

e. Her one flaw is that she is always tryin

—not to date, to be friends. Whenever I r

“Oh, I’m inviting Suzy, you have to meet her!” Ar

but I never have time with my own fri

I worry it’s

I am trying to figure it all out but the main

What do I do?

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SEP

Second Wheel

Dear Wheel,

Of course, it’s you! But not because there’s something wrong with you, yo
so fabulous that your friend wants others to see it! If you were too intens
unpleasant one on one, I guarantee your friend wouldn’t want to share th
with her world. That said, who cares? I hate when people do this with me
They also say things like, “You’re funny and Jewish and she’s funny and
Jewish” and then I end up lunching with a bad Barbra Streisand imperson
Also, it implies that we want more friends which most of us do not (my f
Jancee and I have a rule, no new friends unless someone dies). Sometimes
nice to mingle with friends’ friends and sometimes you want to talk to yo
friend alone—like when you want to share something personal or just cat
on things that would be boring for a new person. What do you do? Tell h
You ask her to lunch and she says, “You have to meet Suzy,” and you say
love to but maybe another time, this time I’d like to have lunch alone wit
so we can really talk.” In some way you are both complimenting each oth
helps if you try and see it that way.

XX

Julie

About the Author

Julie Klam grew up in Bedford, New York. After attending NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and interning at Late Night with David Letterman, she went on to write for such publications as O: The Oprah Magazine, Rolling Stone, Harper's Bazaar, Glamour, and The New York Times Magazine and for the VH1 television show Pop-Up Video, where she earned an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Special Class Writing. She is the best-selling author of *Friendkeeping: A Field Guide to the People You Love, Hate, and Can't Live Without*. She lives in

and can't live without. She lives in
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DEAR JULIE: ADVICE ABOUT THE FALLOUT OF FRIENDLY MAKEOUT AND HELPING A SOBER PAL

**DAME's Friendkeeper
counsels a woman who
was seduced, then
jilted, by a friend; and
encourages another to
give her newly sober pal
some breathing room.**

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ear Julie,

My friend came on to me the other night and I didn't exactly push her away. Which is to say, we ended up having a total makeout session. We didn't stay together, but we have been flirting for the past year. I feel like this has been

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coming for a long time. Yet the next day, she didn't want to talk about it, except to say she never wanted it to happen again. And now I feel heartsick, not, but this isn't the first time she's fooled around with someone back from this? I feel somehow responsible, not the initiator. Was I supposed to have helped her advances? If I did, I feel like I'd have hurt her feelings. I can't stop thinking about this, not only worrying whether I'm doing it differently, but also because I realize I have feelings for her. This is just... Can this friendship be saved?

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Rebuffed

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Julie Klam (https://www.damemagazine.com/author/julie-klam/) May 29, 2014

Dear Rebuffed,

You did not do anything wrong and I don't like the implication that because you're gay, you're the Captain of the Gay Ship. You are a person with feelings and she is a person with feelings. Clearly she has major ambivalence issues with her own self, and I've seen this happen before—somehow the straight person makes the gay person feel like they “did something.” Like, you know, put your gay wammer jammer on her. And then somehow the “interaction” should have an effect on you because you were already gay, you know, big deal! You kissed another girl! No. That is not it. And I don't know what she's capable of but you absolutely need to have a sit down about this and talk it through. Because there's a big rainbow elephant in the room, and it's impossible to move forward until you can move it out of your way.

That said, it happens with straight people, too. You are good friends with someone, you fool around with them, one of you (Harry) doesn't want it and the other one (Sally) does and it can be extremely complicated. And it will

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time and some discussion and thought and understanding to see if the
friendship can be saved

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Julie



Dear Julie,

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One of my best friends has recently become sober and gone into the program. I'm really proud of her. I've offered to go to Al-Anon meetings with her, and of course, not because we have to drink together—not getting drunk together necessarily—and that she can't spend time with me. She only wants to spend time with her new sober friends. I understand that, but I'm hurt that she considers me an enabler. I've been her sobriety enabler. Is there anything I can do to convince her otherwise? She won't see me. I miss the shit out of her. I don't even drink that much. I'd love to spend time with her again and I've told her as much but I can't seem to change her mind. Is this just a phase? Should I just be patient and wait for her to go through the steps?

Signed,

Feeling Abandoned

Dear Feeling,

I'm not an addiction expert by any stretch of the imagination—I mean, I have this thing that if I buy a pack of gum I have to put the whole thing in my mouth at one time, so I had to stop buying gum, but I don't really know much about addiction and recovery. HOWEVER (you know not being an expert never stopped me from giving advice), I think that anything a recovering addict feels they need to do, what they are doing absolutely must be respected. A three-month hiatus is just not that long of a time, and if something about your friend hanging out together makes your friend feel like drinking, then stay away from her and let her get through this. Further down the road, she may feel differently, but now the best most supportive thing you could do is wish her peace.

xx

Julie

About the Author

Julie Klam grew up in Bedford, New York. After attending NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and interning at Late Night with David Letterman, she went on to write for such publications as O: The Oprah Magazine, Rolling Stone, Harper's Bazaar, Glamour, and The New York Times Magazine and for the VH1 television show Pop-Up Video, where she earned an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Special Class Writing. She is the best-selling author of *Friendkeeping: A Field Guide to the People You Love, Hate, and Can't Live Without*. She lives in New York City.

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