

FALL FASHION

‘My Husband Has No Friends’ For some wives, first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes ... managing their spouse’s social life?

By Monica Corcoran Harel, a journalist and screenwriter who covers culture and relationships

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For the record my husband, Gadi, does in fact have friends. He prioritizes them as much as Beethoven committed to his afternoon walks. “Don’t forget I’m going to the sauna tonight,” Gadi says to me every Monday, before he and his pal Eric endure their weekly hour in a redwood barrel for two in Eric’s backyard. On Friday nights, he directs a rowdy YouTube show with three male co-hosts, and afterward, they all go out to a local Italian joint. He also takes off twice a year from our place in L.A. to New York or Palm Springs, where he’ll play poker and eat Hot Pockets with college buddies.

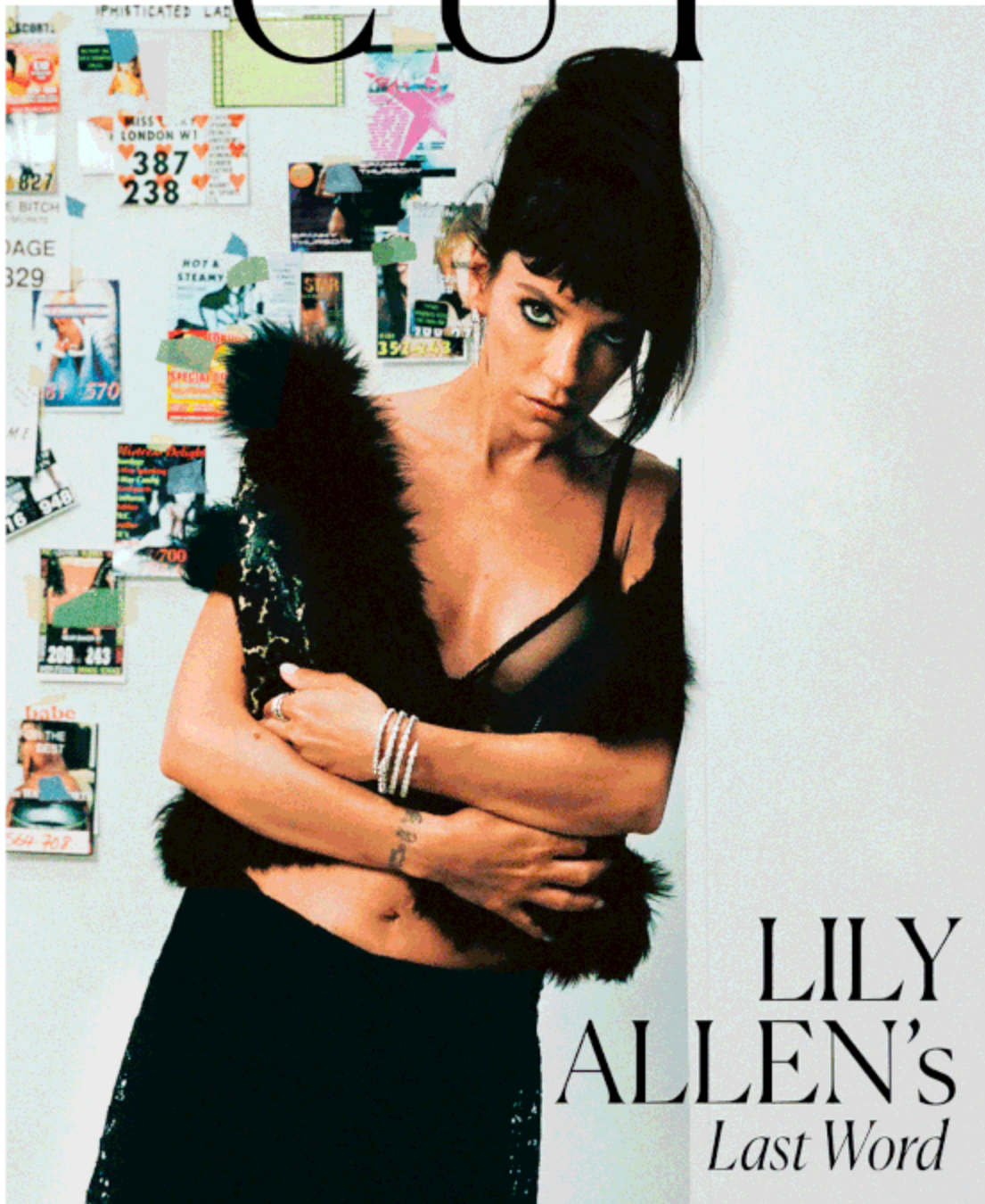
When Gadi goes out with his pals, I am fundamentally torn between savoring a block of alone time, sprawled spread-eagled on our queen bed like a dead woman, and ticking off my to-do list, which includes needling our teen daughter to do her laundry and checking in on my 85-year-old mother, who lives in a condo nearby. He reigns over the dishwasher, folds clothes, and walks the dog. I think he unintentionally handles quantifiable tasks while I tackle the “invisible work,” like replacing toilet paper, vacuuming under the beds, and swiping at coffee-cup rings with a rag. How is it that I am the only one who sees blobs of toothpaste in the sink and burnt-out bulbs in the chandelier?



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But I'm not complaining about his guy time. His social interactions free me from being his emotional be-all and



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don't seem to be so lucky. One friend of mine tells me she feels bad about running off to girls' brunches and leaving her hibernating husband at home alone — thankfully, I don't have to shoulder that “wife guilt” or scout pastimes for my partner. I get to sidestep the quiet burden of a lonesome man that too often falls on the partner in a heteronormative relationship. It's not just women I know. When I posted about this on Instagram, wives from across the country, and as far away as Ireland, DM'd me. The consensus is that they feel alarmed by — and obligated to fix — their husbands' friendlessness.

If you look closely, you'll see these women everywhere: the “wing wife,” who talks her husband up at social events because he doesn't say much or engage. She's like the not-as-pretty or wacky best friend at the bar in every '90s rom-com who helps Drew Barrymore look good and snag the leading man. There's also the “take-flight wife.” She literally pushes her spouse toward a group of men, as a bird urges her fledgling out of the nest. I see this dynamic at play a lot at school events, where one dad will hover near a gaggle of gossiping moms until his wife shoos him away. The “not-now wife,” on the other hand, refuses to play the game. She's usually been married for more than a decade and resents her introverted husband.

Recently, I huddled with three married women at a party in the Hollywood Hills to talk about the hellscape of perimenopause when a husband loped over to joke about his own aging issues. His stand-up monologue about ear hair didn't land. His “not-now wife” drifted away. At a couples' dinner, I overheard a wife hiss across the table to her mate, “Talk to the men.” He had been staring at his empty plate like Narcissus at his own reflection. Later, she inserted her husband into a male conversation about cocktails by screeching, “Tim makes the best old-fashioned. You use extra bitters, right?” The men looked to him as he stammered something about muddling the



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7-year-old daughter: “Put Katie in, Coach!”) I once heard a wife introduce her husband with a social disclaimer: “He doesn’t talk, but he’s happy to be here.”

A lot of women tell me this is new. Their spouses weren’t always so withdrawn. They married fun men who had fun friends. Their husbands used to hang out, even text, with those dudes. They had lives outside their romantic relationship. Somewhere along the way, though, they quit making the effort. These men don’t seem to realize how much women work at keeping friendships alive. I liken it to stoking a fire at a campsite: We gather kindling, gauge the wind, blow on the embers. Some men just watch the flames diminish to a flicker. They’re left with a pile of ash and come to rely on their wives for any shred of a social plan — or simply meander around the house every weekend like moose, an amiable but solitary species.

Maria, who lives in a suburb of San Francisco, tells me her husband of 22 years doesn’t go out anymore. She adds that he doesn’t try reaching out to his old friends. “He was on the couch when I left to run errands and play mahjong last Saturday,” she says. “I was gone for, like, six hours, and when I got home, he was still there. Did he even get up once?”

By now, we’ve heard all about the male-friendship recession and how isolated men have become. The topic is hardly news. (Never mind the fact that women, too, are in crisis when it comes to finding community.) In 2021, a study from the Survey Center on American Life reported that 15 percent of men had zero close friends, up from



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Nick, an architect whose wife has a corporate job, says his teen sons have clocked his lack of buddies — and recently humiliated him at a high-school soccer game. “In front of everyone, one of them is like, ‘Why don’t you have friends, Dad?’ I said, ‘Because I am always with you guys!’” He goes on to explain that between work during the week and tending to his sons’ “nonstop activities,” he can’t prioritize palling around with his peers. “Your friendships take a back seat to dad stuff and then you feel weird reaching out after two years to say, ‘Let’s hang.’”

It strikes me that a fair share of my own current friends are women I have met in the past decade or so on the mom circuit. And here’s why: Women volunteer at school events. (I played room parent at my daughter’s charter school for five years straight and never once saw a dad doing the same for any of the classes.) Women hustle kids off to birthday parties and congregate while they devour cake. Women arrange playdates like they did bachelorette trips and milestone-birthday brunches. All of these activities bring moms together, and we build community. A 2024 report titled “The Free-Time Gender Gap” from the Gender Equity Policy Institute found that working women spend roughly twice as many hours as working men per week on child care. That’s not fair, but at least moms walk away from all this work with bonus friends.



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Julie Menanno, a couples therapist and attachment-theory expert who is the author of the best seller *Secure Love: Create a Relationship That Lasts a Lifetime*, thinks the larger issue is that men, married or not, don't even process the fact that they crave connection. "They're so disconnected from their emotional-relationship needs that they don't realize, 'Hey, I feel lonely.'" That loneliness can manifest as aggression or irritation or even depression. And for men who are partnered up, it may feel easier to prioritize providing for the family over bonding with buddies. "The global issue is a lack of intimacy stemming from difficulty connecting. They regulate those feelings by trying harder on the surface, being more successful," Menanno says. The ultimate fallout? "They can become more lonely from their wives too," she adds.

Or they just assume their wives are their ride or die. According to an article in the *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 64 percent of men list their spouse as their best friend; less than half of wives agree. I think a lot of men would flunk a BFF test, though. My husband doesn't understand my need to verbally analyze a situation more than once. "I thought we already talked about that," he says if I circle back to a topic. He doesn't get that I need to *Rashomon* the shit out of a weird encounter with a colleague or a grievance with my family. My actual best friends allot time and energy to buzz around a problem with me from every angle like drones.

I ask my husband, with no prompting, to name his bestie. "Probably Scott," he says of his childhood pal from New Jersey, a fellow Knicks fanatic. I sigh with relief. Back in the courtship phase, we acted like BFFs. We talked about everything. We did everything together. This exchange of emotions, interests, and information was the currency we banked to build a foundation of trust. But once we legally cemented ourselves to each other — and exhausted our supply of amusing stories — we branched out. My friends have become the first ones to know



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My husband tells me his friends remind him of who he is at his core, not who he's supposed to be. He can crack himself open and reveal the anxious roil of his insides. I see it too. There's an existential ease in my husband after he sees his friends. He's more relaxed than you'd expect of a man who lives with a middle-aged wife and a teen daughter who are both hormonal right now. "It's really hard for a man to tell another man, 'I'm scared for my future,'" Gadi tells me. "But that's the prevailing fear these days. And you really just need one man you can confide in so you don't feel alone."

Men withdraw like nervous hermit crabs. They isolate. They drink. They burrow deeper into their sadness. A 2025 Pew Research Center study found that 54 percent of women say they turn to a friend for emotional support but only 38 percent of men say they do.

"I'm sort of struggling with my self-worth and identity, and I don't have a natural built-in support system like my wife does," says Seth, a British transplant in L.A. He was laid off years ago from his job as a TV executive and has been freelancing ever since. When Seth consults from home, he doesn't meet his clients face-to-face. They don't get the chance to bond. He tells me he's reluctant to reach out to former co-workers because he doesn't technically have a new job and talk of the old workplace gets awkward. "But I don't want to pull my heart out or have therapy sessions with friends. I want to be fun to be around."

"I want to feel wanted," Seth continues. "Just, you know, have some laughs." He pauses. "I want to feel alive."



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he says. Simon’s lack of buddies is a hot topic in his marriage. That he and his wife don’t have children, he adds, also deprives them of opportunities to socialize with fellow parents. But she pitches in to help mothers in the neighborhood by watching their children. He says men don’t do that type of thing. “My wife is like that mom who’s pushing the kid out the door to have fun with his friends. And I’m like that kid who says, ‘But I just want to play video games.’”

There’s a name for what Simon’s wife is doing: “mankeeping.” Angelica Puzio Ferrara and Dylan P. Vergara of Stanford University coined this term in a 2024 article in the journal *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*. They define it as “the labor women take on to shore up losses in men’s social networks and reduce the burden of men’s isolation on families, the heterosexual bond, and on men.” In other words, add “Get husband a life” to the to-do list.

ly Elliott

Sylvia in Colorado says her 50-something spouse once made time for a pickup basketball game every weekend. That was 15 years ago, when they lived in Chicago. But after they moved, he didn’t extend himself to make new guy friends. She bonded with other mothers and found friends at the local tennis club. When she prodded her



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Maria, too, has moved on from rustling up plans for her antisocial husband. “I used to feel like it was on me to be the coordinator, but I don’t anymore. That’s his responsibility,” she says. “He could die watching Netflix with a glass of wine in his hand. I’m joking, but that’s the norm in our house now.” Some women make it their mission to pair up their mates with other men. A friend told me she once arranged a dinner playdate for her insular husband with a work colleague’s husband. He agreed to go. That night, she lingered by the door like a roommate anxious to hear about a first date. “He walked in and said, ‘Nice guy, but I’m exhausted from all that talking. Never again.’” She doesn’t set him up anymore.

An antisocial husband is a liability in a couple when it comes to neighborhood dinner parties and group vacations. I have seen women slip off the social circuit because their husbands don’t want to join in on the fun. Some of them become co-homebodies out of guilt; others seek out activities exclusive to women like mahjong or book clubs. “The invites for two stop coming, and that affects my life,” says Sylvia. Maria just joined a birding club.

Another woman, who suspects her husband might be on the spectrum, tells me she entertains a lot so he can join in. “Do I want to host a Fourth of July barbecue or another cocktail party? Not really, but it forces him to talk to other guys. He’s more comfortable in our house because he can grill or make margaritas.” Seth, who’s the father of an only child, says his teen son is always begging for a sleepover with another boy. He adds with a laugh, “Maybe that’s why men get married. We’re all just looking for a built-in, never-ending sleepover.”

“When women are pushed to have more sex with their husbands. does it work? No. You can’t push men to



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encourage men to tune in to their solitude. “Men need to take their focus, that Spidey sense, off the external and start looking inward. The good news is our fears point us to our longings. Men want what women want: connection.”

I don’t doubt Faller’s theory. He leads men’s groups and, as a former firefighter, counsels lonely first responders. Still, “wanting” and “getting” are light-years apart. “Look, my husband would rather make more money than friends,” says Kate, the wife of a high-profile Wall Street executive. Their real-estate holdings alone are worth more than \$50 million. “He wasn’t the smartest guy in his friend group growing up, so he’s always trying to prove himself. That’s not conducive to friendship.”

So what’s a wife to do? The benefits of guy time are inarguable, and men need to open up now more than ever. But here’s the disturbing, even infuriating, takeaway: Women lose time bonding outside their marriage because they’re stressing about their forlorn mates or playing BFF to them. But we can’t be our husbands’ everything forever. A UCLA psychologist once told me males will die out first in an apocalypse because they don’t build community. Lone wolves can howl at the moon all they want, but they won’t survive. Sadly, they brought it on themselves.

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By Cathy Horyn



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By Alison Green



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