

Catfights



N.Y. Post Elizabeth Lippman

'I was hanging around ... women she didn't like.'

— Lisa Rosman, with estranged friend Evelyn (below left)



New York pals squabble in therapy — before calling it quits

By ANDREA MEYER
It happened one night. Jennifer Nash, a 31-year-old Manhattan freelance creative director, wore jeans and a T-shirt to her best friend's engagement party. Her best friend wore a long, formal ball gown. "Everyone was pissed off that I looked cuter in my jeans and T-shirt," Nash says.
It was the last in a series of confrontations, but Nash thought that the fight wasn't just about fashion choices: "I think it boiled down to [the fact that] I ended up with too much star power," Nash says of the way it often seemed she outshone her friend.
Still, she wanted to try and salvage the relationship, so Nash suggested they both go and see Nash's shrink. "We spent most

of the time talking about how I ruined her party," Nash says.
It was a big drama. Nash says that her friend felt that her own feelings were constantly ignored, and that the party was the epitome of Nash's self-centeredness.
"I thought, 'OK, that's interesting; she's entitled to her opinions,'" says Nash. "But I didn't think the therapist agreed with her. I thought the therapist was trying to get her to realize that she was being ridiculous."
"I think some progress was made," says Dr. Vera Pasteur, who treated the two. "I think they became less demanding of intimate friendship than they used to be. You don't have the same needs all the time. You change, and the other person changes, and that's OK."
Ultimately, Nash and her

friend felt it was best to only see each other occasionally. "And she invited me to be a bridesmaid in her wedding," Nash adds, adding that the therapy "allowed me to be more chill" about the status of the relationship: "We don't call it over, but we don't call it 'riding off into the sunset' either," she says.
Like old married couples, squabbling friends who can't stop fighting are seeing shrinks to get over their issues. And though there's a 50-50 chance the friendship will survive or be strengthened, that hasn't stopped troubled friends from seeking professional help.
Lisa Rosman, a 31-year-old writer from Brooklyn, felt conflicted when she began growing apart from her friend Evelyn. "She was frustrated with me because I was hanging around a

group of women she didn't like," says Rosman. "They were more intellectual. And I was taking my job more seriously than she was," Rosman adds. "She was really jealous of my time, and I acted like a jerk about it instead of being understanding."
Rosman, who admits that she probably "ran hot and cold" on her best friend, decided to bring her into therapy after spending half of her own private sessions "talking about Evelyn — which amazed my therapist, because she was used to people talking about their boyfriends."
But unlike Nash — who credits therapy with helping to salvage her friendship, albeit in a different form — Rosman and her friend Evelyn used their sessions

to facilitate an amicable "breakup."
Rosman didn't have much hope for the friendship anyway, and remains convinced that "just like when a romantic couple goes into therapy, it's usually the kiss of death. Things are over and you just can't deal with it yet," she says. "It was a good breakup, though. We knew we'd tried."
Ultimately, Rosman and Evelyn wound up using their time apart to decompress, and are now able to hang out again.
For most New Yorkers, paying a shrink to listen to your problems is practically a rite of passage. But paying a shrink to mediate a fight over what one of

on the couch

Are we breaking up?

Here's what our shrinks think can and can't be resolved in a friendship:

Workable
Stealing a guy
Hyper-competitiveness
Getting B-listed

Deal-breakers
Lying
Stealing ideas/style
Betraying a secret

you wore to your friend's party would strike most people as, at best, silly. But Jan Yager, adjunct professor of sociology at the University of Connecticut and author of "When Friendship Hurts: How to Deal with Friends Who Betray, Abandon, or Wound You," believes that a higher number of troubled friends would seek help if they didn't feel so weird about it.
"There's a stigma to admitting that a friendship is so important to you," says Yager. "It's one thing to say 'My marriage is on the rocks.' But 'I'm upset that my friendship is falling apart?' It's almost embarrassing for the friendship to mean so much."
But a breakup with a friend can, in some ways, be more traumatic than a breakup with a boyfriend or a spouse, because there's no real support structure in place.
"If you get a divorce, it's a change in status: You go from married to divorced. With friends, it's not a change in living arrangement, in status, in finances. If anything, someone might say, 'Why isn't so-and-so at your birthday party?'"
"To some degree, it's worse to break up with friends," says Rosman. "We expect to break up with boyfriends. There's a system in place to comfort each other. But just like it seems weird to go to therapy, it's weird to break up. When you break up with a friend, it's draining and sad, but it's not like people are going to give you sympathy cards and chocolates."
Friendships are also under more stress and strain in a city like New York, where the majority of people who live here aren't from here — so they create surrogate families of their own.
In fact, the average functionally dysfunctional group of friends in Manhattan gave rise to TV shows from "Seinfeld" and "Friends" to "Sex and the City" and "Will & Grace."
"Since most people's families aren't in New York, friends become the family," says Sherine Schostak, a shrink who has treated two friends who "broke up" while trying to write a screenplay.
"The people who come here are pretty ambitious; their careers are very important to them. At the end of the day, they meet their friends. They don't follow the traditional path of getting married right away."



N.Y. Post: Jennifer Weisbord

'I looked cuter.'

— Jennifer Nash

And the kinds of people who come here are open to unconventional forms of therapy: "In general, the sophistication and the social climate of turning to therapy if there are problems is much more prevalent in cities," says Pasteur.
Schostak agrees. "Outside the big cities, people don't even go to therapy individually unless they're suicidal. But people here go like they go get a manicure. It's normal. You hear people say, 'Oh, my shrink says ...' It's cool. They say, 'Who's your Reiki master? Who's your therapist?' Now it'll be, 'Who's your friend therapist? You mean you don't have one?'"
And people who seek friend therapy mainly tend to be women. "Women turn to therapy much more than men," says Pasteur.
"I think we just get more emotional in general. Men are much more likely to go have a drink. Women are more intense in relationships and want to get to the root of things."
Patti — a 34-year-old marketing director who declined to reveal her

last name — can relate. She brought her roommate, who was also her best friend, into therapy at her shrink's suggestion.
"There was no single incident," Patti says. "We had different kinds of jobs and boyfriends and we were drifting apart. We weren't really talking; there were a lot of hurt feelings."
In the end, the sessions helped immensely: "Getting everyone's feelings out into the open made it clear it wasn't a personal thing," she says.
"If the relationship is of value, then it's worth trying to save," Pasteur says. "New Yorkers are often not dealing with their siblings and parents on a daily basis, so they become very involved in a friendship network. Friends need each other. It's worth the investment."
For her part, Nash says she'd spend the cash all over again. "It was money well spent," she says. "I didn't want to stand by and watch something that was good die just because of a misunderstanding. That's a 10-year friendship. Most marriages don't last that long."

Adios, amigos

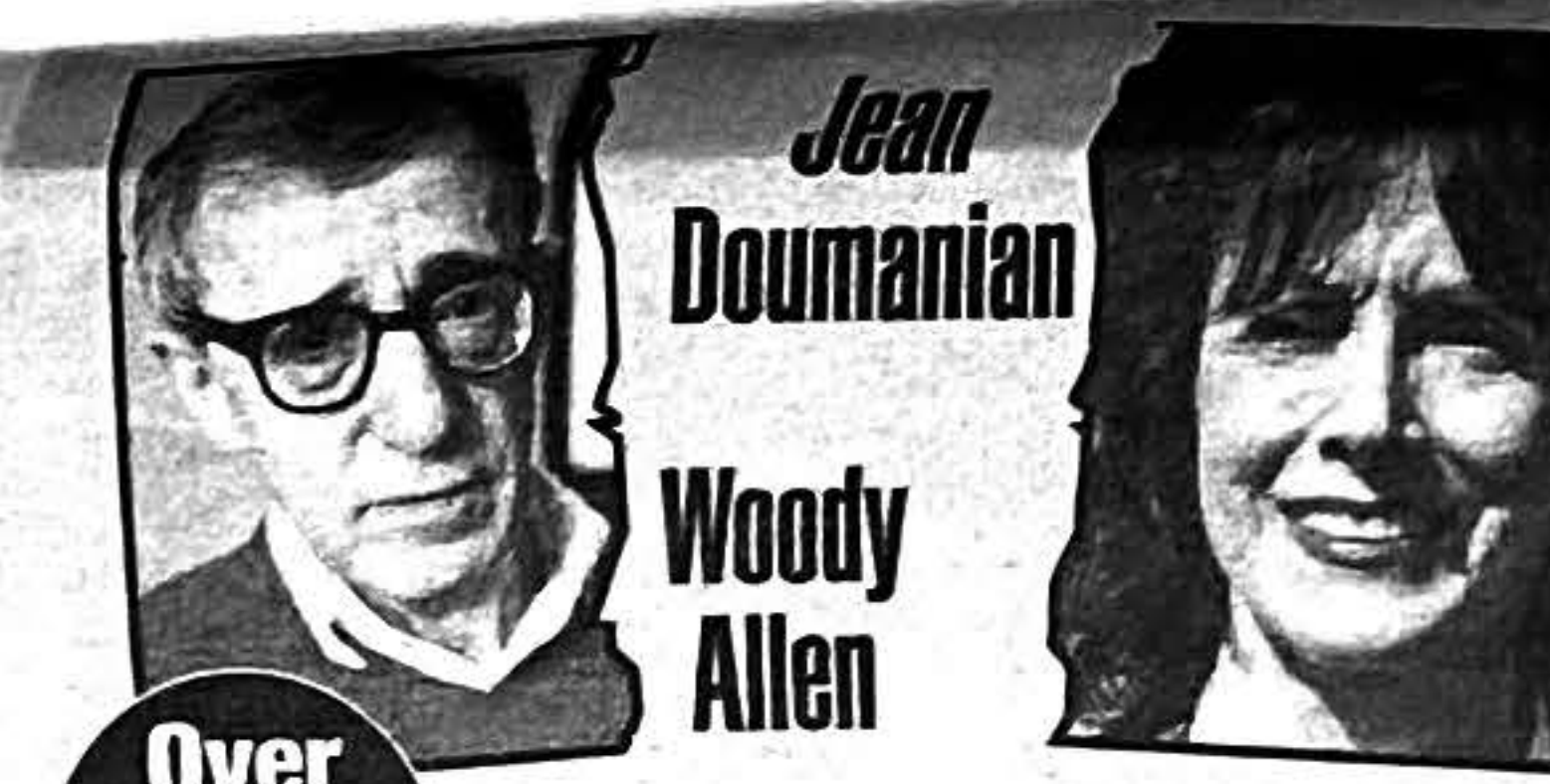
Why some famous friends reportedly broke up:



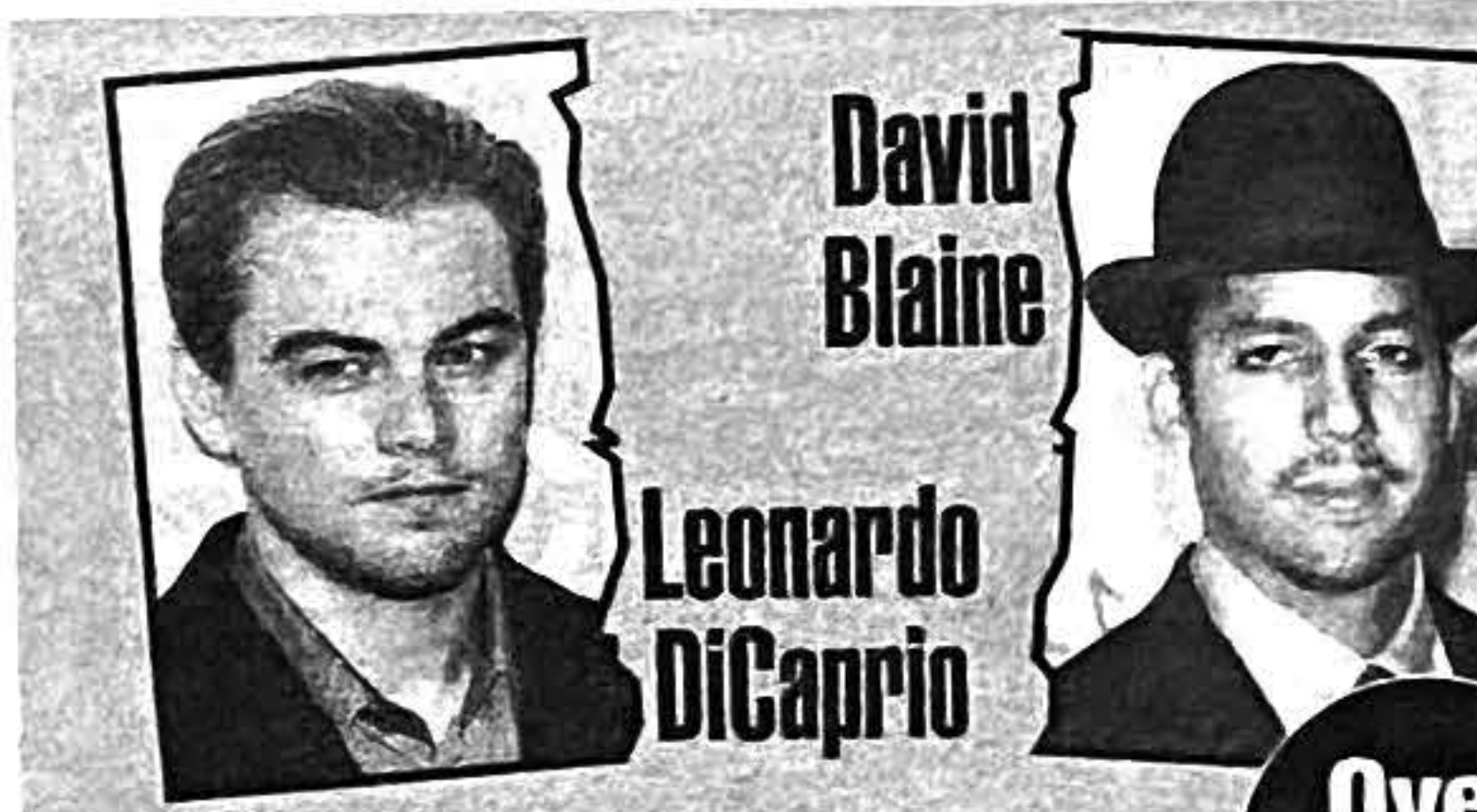
Over a part?
Reportedly fell out when Paltrow allegedly found a copy of "Shakespeare in Love" at Ryder's house.



Over another pal?
Bernhard once said that the singer "will steal your friends."



Over money?
Decades-long best friends and business partners until Allen sued Doumanian for \$14 million.



Over fame?
Magician Blaine reportedly excused himself from Leo's inner circle to become famous in own right.



Over a girl?
Though they're still tight, Damon is rumored to be concerned about Affleck's impending marriage.