

By KRIS FRIESWICK

MAKE NEW FRIENDS, KEEP THE OLD. BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ONE IS SILVER AND THE OTHER IS . . . GOLD?

Haves and Have-nots

MY HUSBAND AND I were on a cruise recently and we became fast friends with a brother and sister traveling with their spouses. We had dinner with them on our first night ashore. They began ordering bottles of wine for the table that were so expensive that, even though we'd be paying only a third of the price, my husband and I assumed we'd be eating PB&J for a month once we got home.

Before the bill even hit the table, one of our new friends whipped out her exclusive black American Express card to pay for the whole thing. When I copiously thanked her, she said, "Honey, it's our pleasure. We're so glad you could join us."

She was unfazed by the bill. She is wealthy, likes expensive things, and doesn't expect friends less well off to contribute equally when she wants them around. It was my husband and I who were fazed. We pay our own way, and we feel like freeloaders if we don't. But if you have friends who are much

more moneyed than you, these visible signs of wealth will appear. And if you want to stay friends, you have to learn how to deal with them.

Unfortunately, many women have a tendency to use the "pie" theory when they see other women with money, says Susan Shapiro Barash, a gender-issue expert and author of *Tripping the Prom Queen: The Truth About Women and Rivalry* (St. Martin's Press, 2006). "It's called the limited-good theory," says Barash. "There's enough pie to go around for men, but there hasn't historically been enough for women. What women feel is that they can't have it because *she* has it." Even when jealousy doesn't crop up, money definitely influences our friendships, says Barash. "Based on my interviews with women over the last 10 years, money has become more of an important factor in a woman's life because materialism is at an all-time high."

Experts say the most important thing to do when dealing with more – or less – moneyed friends is



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not to ignore the issue.

“You can’t change the financials in a relationship,” says Stacy Kaiser, a psychotherapist and speaker in Los Angeles, where she counsels lots of haves and have-nots on how to deal with financial disparities among friends. “But what you can do is keep open communication. What I always suggest to people is, don’t make assumptions. Don’t try to make decisions for your friends.”

For instance, if you’re wealthy, don’t go out and buy a Nine West handbag or a watch from Target to wear around your less rich friends so they won’t feel inferior. You are kidding absolutely no one. Wear the Tag, break out the Birkin. Always offer to

split dinner with a wealthier buddy. Don’t expect your rich friends to pay unless they offer. Be thankful, not offended, if they do pay. Don’t assume your moneyed friend won’t appreciate a simple dinner at your house with cheap beer and pizza. And rich girls, your middle-class chums would *love* to be invited to your swanky party. Offer to loan one a dress if she says she’s got nothing to wear. Above all, remember why you’re friends in the first place – it’s not what you have, but who you are. “Look for things that you do have in common,” says Kaiser. “That’s what makes friends be friends.”

Kris Frieswick, who lives in Boston, writes frequently about money.

How Much We Make

Yearly earnings for US women who work full time, year-round.

\$1-\$9,999 or less

2.8%

\$10,000-\$14,999

7.1%

\$15,000-\$24,999

21.6%

\$25,000-\$34,999

22%

\$35,000-\$49,999

21.4%

\$50,000-\$64,999

11.7%

\$65,000-\$74,999

4.1%

\$75,000-\$99,999

5.1%

\$100,000 or more

4.2%

SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU, 2006 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY