

"Babe, we so have to Instagram this and pretend it's just a coincidence we're twinning out."



# The couple chameleon

"Who are you and what have you done with my friend?!"  
How to deal when your mate is morphing into her man...

WORDS CASSIE STEEL. PHOTOGRAPHY CORBIS. \*NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED FOR ANONYMITY

The last time Ali\*, 25, saw her cousin Sarah\*, 27, she was dating an iron-pumping give-me-all-the-meat CrossFit addict who rocked a mean "Shut up and train" tee. And Sarah was the same. She was on a strict protein-only diet, doing the whole tights-as-pants thing and raving about a new abs workout that gave her a six-pack in, like, a week. This is the same cousin who now, just one year and a break-up later, is talking about getting dreads, going off the grid and moving to Byron Bay with her new yoga-teaching vegan squeeze (who, FYI, doesn't wear shoes at all). Coincidence? We think not. "Every time we catch up, she seems to be going through a different phase that revolves around the guy she's dating," Ali explains. "We all joke around about it, but I do worry that she changes who she is a little too much."

But dating is supposed to be about compromise, right? Well, sort of, says principle psychologist Rachel Voysey (relationshiproom.com.au). "We expect our friends to make a few changes to accommodate their new partners," she says. "However, if they compromise their identities over time, they may become resentful because they aren't who they really want to be." We'll be the first to admit that maintaining a sense of self while in a relationship can be hard. So hard. Especially if you're in that I-wanna-be-with-you-all-the-time-even-when-you-have-morning-breath-and-you-haven't-washed-the-dishes early days phase. For the Sarahs (doing the changing) and the Alis (watching a friend), we've put together the cheat's guide to resisting the curse of the couple chameleon.

## The diagnosis

That term we just dropped? Yep, it's a thing. The couple chameleon changes everything from their looks to their likes and lifestyle every time they start dating someone new. And we're not just talking about turning up to a mate's barbecue in matching denim jackets – that's sort of adorable. Couple chameleons or partner morphers leave their 'single selves' well behind and basically become who they're dating. Suddenly they're big-time into things they were 'meh' about before (Ali: "I swear Sarah hated tofu") and into eliminating the many things they were previously crushing on (Ali: "Since when is Sarah not obsessed with Facebook?"). "Often, the first thing we notice is that they're making less time for their good

**GIRL, YOU'VE CH-CH-CHANGED!**

- Your entire wardrobe has had a major makeover since you guys hooked up. In fact, people don't recognise you.
- You share a Facebook, Instagram and Twitter account because you post the same stuff.
- His friends love you. And yours? You haven't seen them in ages.
- You'd go anywhere in the world to be with him. Even if it meant quitting your job and moving out of your awesome apartment (you've been dating a week).

## Take your 'transforming' temp

- If someone wants to contact him, they call you because they know you're always together.
- Your guy doesn't know that you secretly hate mountain bike riding (his #2 love). You fake it so well.
- The two of you have at least three matching outfits.
- Your taste in music has done a flip since meeting him. He's introduced you to so many cool bands you genuinely like.

**LOVED-UP BUT HEALTHY**

friends and their own interests, and are disappearing rapidly into their partner's social circles, activities and way of life," warns Voysey. And this is worrying. For starters, if your mate's given up all that she does and who she is to help 'fit in' with that guy she's dating, what happens if they don't work out? Voysey agrees. "The excitement of their new love life may have her world spinning, but if they don't keep their eyes on something steady, like who they really are, it doesn't take much for them to suddenly lose balance and crash if things take an unexpected turn."

## The intervention

We've listened to enough Beyoncé songs to know that maintaining a strong sense of self is Girl Power 101 and holds the key to happiness (both alone and coupled-up). If your friend has gone all Optimus

Prime and transformed her everything since seeing Mr New, Voysey suggests you pipe up and voice your concerns. "It's always best to start the conversation off with some of the positive points about her new relationship," she recommends. "Let her know how happy you've noticed she has been lately or what a nice guy you think her new boyfriend is." On top of that, Voysey emphasises the importance of expressing your observations from a position of care. "Let her know you're looking out for her best interests, and are checking in to make sure that she's mindfully making the changes to who she is." Hey, who knows, she might even be completely oblivious to how much she's compromised and be appreciative that you pointed it out to her. "However, she may react. Always try to remain open and supportive rather than judgmental or critical," says Voysey. If she's not into the discussion, let it go. That way, your friend is more likely to feel she can trust you later if it does start to affect her.

## The cure

If you've read this far, and thought, "Err, hang on a minute, I think I might be the couple chameleon", then a) hi and b) don't freak out... yet. Firstly, if you're worried because you spent all of last weekend watching action movies, as opposed to all those cute French indies you usually enjoy, don't be. The same goes for your new-found interest in whiskey, politics and not washing your hair. Learning all about who your new guy is and what he's into is one of the best things about dating. Hello, new taste in cheese, booze, bad movies and terrible music. "Enjoy the process of seeing what they bring out in you as a person and what you bring out in them," urges Voysey.

However, if you're actively trying to change who you are to fit in with your partner, that's a different story. "It can certainly be a damaging pattern to be in if you find you are continuously getting into relationships by trying to be who you think your partner wants," says Voysey. If you find yourself feeling disconnected from your friends and family, and like you've lost a sense of yourself, open up to someone you can trust and let them know how you're feeling. "Happiness is almost always gained from living life in a way that is in line with the dreams and ideas about what we want to do with our lives," Voysey tells us. And you know what? A truly amazing partner wouldn't want you to change a single thing. 🍷