

Queen bees acting mean at the office

“Something is clearly amiss in the professional sisterhood.”

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Peggy Drexler

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“Something is clearly amiss in the professional sisterhood,” said Peggy Drexler. Too many women seem more intent on undercutting their female office colleagues than helping them get ahead. One survey found that 40 percent of office bullies are women, and another determined that while male bullies tend to be “equal-opportunity tormentors,” female bullies direct their hostility toward other women 80 percent of the time. Some 40 years ago, researchers identified this as the “queen bee syndrome,” and suggested that “the patriarchal culture of work encouraged the few women who rose to the top to become obsessed with maintaining their authority.” It’s apparently no better now. These women “are able to exploit female vulnerabilities that men may not see, using tactics that their male counterparts might never even notice”—like commenting on clothes, for instance, or holding other women to higher, “sometimes even unreasonable,” performance expectations. At the same time, female subordinates tend to show “less respect and deference to female bosses than to their male bosses.” The best way to curtail such woman-against-woman behavior is obvious: Make top corporate jobs “as routinely available to women as they are to men.”