

Why do women hate me for being beautiful?

Samantha Brick
Trashed on Twitter



LeAnn Rimes
Accosted in a restaurant



Lauren Goodger
Target of hate campaign



Kim Kardashian
Attacked on the red carpet



Selena Gomez
Death threats from Bieber fans

What Happened To The Sisterhood?

Women are on track to out-earn men for the first time in history by 2030, and a record number of women made the Forbes list of billionaires this year. But while we are making huge dents in the glass ceiling, it seems modern women are now being held back by another obstacle – each other. Cosmo Middle East investigates the rise of girl-on-girl hate

“People like you make the world worse,” “You’re an ugly, stupid b**ch,” “You should be bricked to death”... With comments this acidic, you’d be forgiven for thinking this diatribe was aimed at some heinous criminal, but these are just a few of the thousands of online remarks directed at Samantha Brick,

41, over the last month. What did she do to garner such contempt? She wrote an article in a British newspaper bemoaning her good looks. And while a lot of what Samantha had to say wasn’t cool (she claimed women dislike her because she’s beautiful), the outpouring of hate that followed – most of it from other women – made global headlines.

“I’ve been astounded by the intelligent women... who have taken to their Twitter accounts to trash me in playground bully style,” says Samantha. According to Pat Heim, author of *In The Company of Women*, women are hardwired to get their claws out in this way when another female tries to lord it over the rest of the pack. Think about

how many times you’ve had the following convo: a friend compliments your top and you respond with ‘Oh, this old thing, I got it on sale.’ “The critical factor with women is the issue of power. In this exchange the other woman has built you up and created a potential unevenness of power in the relationship,” says Pat. “So you instinctively bring yourself back down so everything is equal again.”

So when someone like Samantha refuses to redress the power imbalance by coming out and admitting that, ‘Yes, I do look hot,’ she instantly becomes a target. “If the balance of power between women is uneven things can become really ugly – that’s when women attack,” says Pat.

Online Attacks

Twenty-five-year old Danni Rose experienced this ugliness when a stranger started posting nasty Tweets about her. “Shortly after I got together with my boyfriend, his ex-girlfriend started attacking me online – despite the fact that we’d never met, and she was in another relationship,” says Danni, a part-time model. “She posted online that I was a wh*** who only got modelling jobs because I was giving sexual favours to people at castings; she said that I dressed like a prostitute and even made fun of my flat chest, saying that I look like a boy. It was stomach-churning to read,” recalls Danni. “I felt so powerless and helpless. It’s an awful feeling. I was dumbstruck and completely hurt.”

This kind of online attack is increasingly common (there is even a website dedicated to cyber trashing, thedirty.com, which invites users to anonymously gossip about people they don’t like) and it’s down to a range of factors from insecurity to killer competitiveness. “Intra-female aggression is typically born out of a sense that we aren’t comparing favourably to another woman – whether it’s intellect, beauty, wealth or status,” says Kelly Vallen, author of *Twisted Sisterhood*. “The women not feeling so great about themselves are usually the ones who become fixated on what the other woman has, which in turn can set into motion the ugly stuff – the judgments, criticisms and gossip.”

And in the age of the internet, it’s easier than ever to slap an enemy down – without the need for in-your-face confrontation. “The anonymity offered online is a powerful weapon to the

“Intra-female aggression is typically born out a sense that we aren’t comparing favourably to another woman”

weakest cowards,” notes Kelly. “And for females – who tend toward a more covert style of aggression– the internet enables them to lash out and express themselves.”

But while vicious online comments can be deleted, their devastating consequences cannot be so easily erased. Samantha admits she’s been reduced to tears by internet trolls, while Danni says online verbal attacks have rocked her confidence and left her petrified of what her friends and family will think.

“One of the posts said that I had slept with every guy in a band I had worked with. I immediately phoned my mum and told her it wasn’t true. Fortunately, my mum knows me well enough, but I still felt the need to prove things to my family,” says Danni.

Fierce Rivalry

But in a society fuelled by comparisons, it’s difficult not to view the other woman as the enemy. “Competition among women is so totalising,” says Susan Shapiro Barash, author of *Toxic Friends*. “There is a sense that we are all competing against each other for lifestyle, love life, work life, beauty, popularity... all of it.”

Making matters worse is our addiction to shows like *The Real Housewives*, featuring women skilled at backbiting and manipulating each other. “Most of that entertainment is purposely set up to bring on the kind of drama, insults and cat-fighting nonsense that is ultimately anti-female,” says Kelly. “These kinds of depictions reinforce the idea that there is a social pay-off to gossip, competition and backstabbing.”

And it seems women in the public eye are first in line when it comes to girl-on-girl hate – remember Kim Kardashian and that red carpet flour bomb? While Selena Gomez has received death threats from jealous Justin Bieber fans, and LeAnn Rimes claims she was angrily confronted by a woman in an LA

restaurant who slammed her for being too thin. Then there’s reality star Lauren Goodger whose beauty business was petrol-bombed in February.

This all comes back to that killer competitive instinct, says Kelly. “Any female who is different in some way – whether it’s goddess-like beauty, extreme intellect, great clothes, you name it – can be set up for harsh judgment and ill feelings,” says Kelly. “Much of this cruelty is generated out of insecurities and plain old self-loathing.”

So how can we learn to stop hating on each other? “It’s best to learn to love yourself as you are and not get caught up in the comparisons,” advises Kelly. “This is a crucial and comforting lesson, and one I fear isn’t getting through to the *Toddlers and Tiaras* crowd.”

Fighting Back

And if you are the target of this kind of female Vs female abuse, call out your bully, says Pat. “It’s very uncomfortable, but you must deal with the conflict overtly.” This means confronting a bully face-to-face if possible, or addressing them directly online: Kim Kardashian publically slammed her flour bomber as a bully, and it’s a strategy that also worked for Danni when she posted pointed retorts to her attacker on her Facebook. One read: ‘A real woman doesn’t get involved with drama, she knows time is precious and she won’t waste it on unimportant people or things.’ And once Danni fought back, she even began to feel sorry for her attacker. “Once I got past the hurt and the anger, I realised that if she was spending all this time and energy putting me down, she can’t have much going on in her own life.”

The most important thing is that you don’t let one bad experience put you off cultivating strong female friendships. “For those women who have been burned, reach out and put yourself back out there. Chances are, you will find the gems; the women who will have your back, support you, tell you the truth, and accept you just as you are,” says Kelly. Adding, “There is indeed a dark side to female relationships that we’d do well to work on. We really stand to benefit by pulling each other up rather than tearing each other down. Do we have to love every sister out there? No, of course not. But we should treat her with dignity, tolerance and kindness.” ■