



DAWN O'PORTER

HONESTLY...

WARNING she always says what she thinks

“Say what you want about me. Just not to my face”

Everyone's got some kind of issue with themselves, haven't they? A new study shows that 92% of women have hang-ups. I'm not surprised at all. (I'm more intrigued about the 8% that don't. Who are they?) Interestingly though, the No1 hang-up was people worrying about what other people think of them. And I can totally relate to that.

Going to an all-girls school set me up with insecurities for life. It had positives: the belly laughs were agonising, and the fun continuous. But if you fell out of favour, it got brutal. I learnt quickly that people talking about you is inevitable, it's how you deal with it that will affect your life.

I'll never forget the day I was given 'five gold rings' in *The Twelve Days Of Christmas* as my solo in the nativity play. If you don't remember it, that's the best part, the notes are longer and the tune is different from the others. I was so chuffed. But in rehearsals, a few of the girls in my class kept huddling in the corner and making it really obvious that they were talking about me.

It made me feel so rubbish that when it came to my bit I couldn't

THE FUTURE OF WOMEN



I first heard of Bryony Kimmings when Radio 1 presenter Gemma Cairney called me from the Edinburgh Fringe:

“She's astonishing,” she said. And she is!

Bryony is a performance artist working with her nine-year-old niece, Taylor, to create a decent role model for young girls, in the form of pop star Catherine Bennett. Her stage show, *Credible Likeable Superstar Rolemodel*, is as magical as it is important – and it's really, really funny.

Credible Likeable Superstar Rolemodel is at the Soho Theatre, London, October 8-26; sohotheatre.com

get the tune out. I was too self-conscious. I announced that I didn't like my solo, that I would rather something smaller. And that's what I got – 'nine ladies

dancing'. I was gutted. I use it as my reference point, even now, for not letting what people say affect my confidence, but sometimes it's easier said than done.

Recently I discovered that a friend – a distant friend, but still a friend – had told a group of other friends that I had issues with food. I was particularly annoyed at her for spreading this rumour because a) it isn't true, and b) it's a ridiculous conclusion to draw from seeing me in a flattering outfit that made my legs look slim. Why couldn't she spread cool rumours about me? Like that my husband and I share nights of burning passion with Brad and Angelina, or that I have webbed feet?*

But an eating problem? That's not fun. So when a mate told me about it I swore aggressively and wallowed in the injustice of it all. Then I remembered... just hours earlier I had been discussing another friend's terrible taste in men. 'But I wasn't being nasty,' I thought, (trying to justify my horrid words), 'I was just saying this poor woman would probably end up marrying

a goat.' The truth is, if she'd heard what I said, she would have been heartbroken, no matter how much I tried to brush it off as constructive criticism. Racked with guilt, I realised that ►

◀ I have no right to be angry with somebody else for being a gossip. I do it all the time.

For the next week I tried really hard not to initiate any conversations about anybody else, but whoever I saw, it was usually only a matter of time before someone was being discussed: *I can't believe they're having another child, they can barely cope with one. She just needs to dress more for her size, rather than what's in fashion. She drinks too much, he shouts too much, she cries too much...* It was endless. Unstoppable. Everywhere.

This all left me quite frazzled. If everyone knew everything other people said about them when they weren't around, we would live in a world of gibbering wrecks. So what's the answer? Is it best just not to know?

The phrase 'don't say it behind my back, say it to my face' gets bandied around a lot. But I don't want someone pointing out all of the things they don't like about me, to me.

Looking back, most of my insecurities came about because people were 'just being honest'. Lovers, friends and family sometimes get on each other's nerves, and it's healthy to let off steam to another person. Of course that doesn't stop other loyal friends filling you in on the bitching sometimes. Does that do us any good? In most cases, I think not.

The truth is, for two friends to discuss what a terrible cook you are, for example, over a cup of tea is just them filling airtime and taking a break from their own hang-ups. They don't really care. They won't think about your burnt lasagne beyond that moment. But if you hear about their vacuous conversation you develop a complex like no other. When for them, they finish their tea and get on with their day. The damage is all for you. My distant (possibly a little more distant now) friend has absolutely no evidence to suggest I have an eating disorder. She was just using me as a way to create a conversation that

would make her sound interesting. I'm sure that after a bit of 'ooing' and 'ahhhhing' the group moved on to talk about something that actually mattered. Like Kate Middleton's baby weight. I'll admit I considered calling her to have a pop, but decided to let it go. If I remember rightly, I then celebrated my cool new attitude with steak and chips.

This all might sound a little frivolous, but for someone like me, who has always been deeply affected by others' opinions of me, this was quite the personal revelation. I can't stop people talking about me when I am not around. What I can do is ignore it and just get on with my life. The trick is to brush it off as idle chit-chat, and never give up your solo.

*Note – I don't have webbed feet.

Tell me what you think
@hotpatooties
#GlamourMagUK

love
Dawn
XXX

AUNTIE TWIT
Dawn solves your problems (well, sort of) in 140 characters

@hotpatooties Whether I should go to uni next year on my own + leave boyfriend back home or take gap year to save and get a house together?

@erikaangerid Honestly? Have as much adventure as u can while you're young.

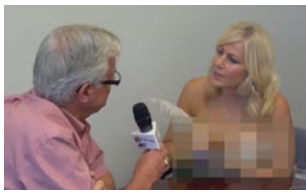
@hotpatooties What can plus size women do that want to shop for vintage styles that were never made to cater for our modern size?

@misfya NO! '50s styles were all about hourglass #ebay

@hotpatooties Football season is back. This pleases me until Oct 14 then I'm fed up. Need to get a balance – suggestions?

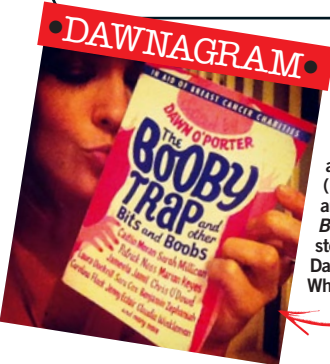
@TheSJTobin Just revel in the stereotype. Run a bath and read, then try on ALL your outfits.

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Get it OFF?

A Canadian journalist, Lori Welbourne, was interviewing Walter Gray, the mayor of Kelowna, recently about the issue of women going topless in public. Halfway through, she got her boobs out. The stunt was a bit of PR for Go Topless Day in Kelowna and Women's Equality Day in the US. But her point was that society has completely sexualised women's bodies. Thing is, I'm not sure this works. Is equality really about us all walking around with our tops off? Maybe it is, and if that's the case, shall we try it too? OK, you go first. 1, 2, 3...



Shout-out...

I promise I won't use my column to plug my own projects, but as it's Breast Cancer Awareness Month, excuse me this once. I have a new book out, and £1 from each sale goes to breast cancer charities (Breast Cancer Care, Breakthrough Breast Cancer and Coppafeel). *The Booby Trap And Other Bits And Boobs* (Hot Key Books, £7.99) is full of poems and stories by celebs, authors and journalists, including Davina McCall, Erin O'Connor and Caroline Flack. While you laugh and cry, we raise a ton of cash! ☺