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Girl Culture and the Race to the Bottom: About that Rant About Women

So, [that Clay Shirky piece](#) about how ladies don't self-promote so much! Perhaps you have heard about it? Because I sure have. I have, in fact, been writing around that very piece for a while now, trying to explain how I feel about it. Because Lord knows no conversation is complete until we have all HEARD ABOUT MY FEELINGS.

The thing is, I am actually not the most impartial commenter on this particular piece for any number of reasons. For one thing, I need to do the FULL DISCLOSURE thing, here, and tell you that I like Clay and consider him a friend. He is a very nice man, that Clay Shirky! And I'm not trying to say that my having a good opinion on the writer of the piece means that I have the Best Perspective Ever on this particular topic. I'm just saying that I *do* have a perspective on it, which I need to acknowledge. Because here is maybe the reason I am the least objective and impartial about it: I have had conversations with Clay Shirky which demonstrate, *exactly*, the particular dynamic he is talking about. These conversations, they have gone like this:

"I, Clay Shirky, believe you to be capable of more than you are doing right now! Allow me to offer you some advice on this particular front."

"Oh, my goodness, NO! I believe you to be severely deluded as to my capabilities! Allow me to present you with a list of reasons why I would not be qualified for doing anything, ever, in the entire world."

FIVE HOURS LATER:

"And so, Clay, those are the reasons that I suck. I can provide you with further proofs of my sucking, drawn from personal history reaching back as far as kindergarten! But I think you have the basics. You see why you must rescind your advice and belief in me as a person, as clearly I would only bring shame upon you. I am but an idiot child, who spills things frequently upon my wretched frame. How did I even get dressed this morning? I don't know! It is a fluke, clearly."

"Um, okay. But I was trying to help...?"

"CEASE THIS FUTILE CRUSADE AT ONCE! I must go now, and mortify my flesh, perhaps with whippings. As I do so, I shall review my sub-standard grades from middle school, that I might never aspire above my due station. Thanks for coffee!"

The thing is: I can see where people might object to the language of the piece, or find that it overgeneralizes about ladies. I can see where people might feel that he misses out on some of the larger structural issues at play. It is a truth universally acknowledged that when a dude entitles something "A Rant About Women," people tend to assume bad faith there, and if there are comments enabled, you can bet there's a-gonna be a rumble. But, as a lady who continually downplays herself, has panic attacks when engaging in even the most mundane and obligatory forms of

self-promotion, and enthusiastically shoots herself in the foot career-wise on a more or less constant basis, I... well, I can't say he's not on to something, basically.

If we're talking about gender, we're (hopefully) not trying to talk about behaviors or traits that every single member of each gender shares to exactly the same degree and in the same way. Because there are none of those! What we *are* talking about, though, are behaviors that are widespread within each group, including some differences between the two groups. And, while probably not every woman in the world is as hugely averse to self-promotion or as neurotically terrified of being a social climber or a narcissist or a craven careerist or a selfish asshole or whatever as I am, I have noticed that an aversion to self-promotion tends to be kind of a lady thing. I basically think we need to get over that.

So, for the moment, I don't necessarily want to talk about why some ladies do self-promote aggressively, and don't get rewarded for it. Because that's been covered. I want to talk about why ladies don't self-promote aggressively. I think there are reasons for this too, as it turns out. Allow me, for the moment, to list some that I have observed! They involve middle school, animal behavior, your mother's dating advice, and a decades-old article in *Ms.* So, you know, bear with me.

Obviously, all of these pieces – Shirky's piece, this piece, any of the other reaction pieces – are rooted in personal experience to some degree, and obviously no personal experience is universal. So: this is what I see, from where I'm standing.

One of the things that I am really into studying, lately, is adolescent female friendship. It is this hugely complicated and fascinating thing, wherein girls create immensely powerful spaces of resistance, but also put each other through Patriarchy Boot Camp, and I am starting to hold the opinion that studying it extensively will reveal to you the Secrets of Life. I won't go into all of that right now! But I will say that I have, recently, been reading a book called [Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls](#), by Rachel Simmons. One passage in this, which grabbed me and blew my mind and suddenly made about a thousand troubling incidents way more easy to understand, was about how female bullies pick their victims. The author interviewed a whole bunch of girls about this, and she came up with a really good, really obvious answer. So, do you want to know how they pick their victims?

They pick the girl who seems the most confident.

Yes, that's really it! In the particular seething cauldron of insecurity, unhappiness, and fear that is female adolescence, girls tend to feel shitty about themselves for about a million reasons, and to think that they need outside approval – from friends, from boys, from the culture at large – in order to be worthwhile. But if a girl seems not reliant enough on outside approval – if she doesn't hate her body enough, if she's too successful at getting guys to like her, if she's not interested enough in getting guys to like her, if she thinks she's smart or cool or worthwhile or pretty (or if she just *is* smart or cool or worthwhile or pretty, and it's pronounced enough for the people around her to take notice) – then the wolves start circling. Because they've all been bullied, too; they've all been undermined; they've all made the mistake of standing out, at one point or another, and they've been punished for it. And now, because they feel like shit about themselves, you have to feel like shit, too. A girl who doesn't feel like shit is a threat to the entire social order, the extensively complicated and crappy system whereby women have to earn their way into a

pretense of self-esteem by getting enough approval from other girls or from other outside sources in general.

What girls learn to do, in order to survive in this particular dynamic, is to race each other to the bottom. It lasts for a lifetime. They maneuver, hiding the urge to matter and succeed under an appropriately self-loathing demeanor, so that they can get ahead and climb up without ever appearing to do it.

For example: have you ever gotten the Complinsult? It is a wondrous and immensely complicated thing, the Complinsult. Here's one of the best I have ever received, which I keep close to my heart: "Your outfit is amazing! I think it's so great that you can wear that out in public. I'd never have the nerve." The words are saying "I suck and you are awesome," and yet? That is EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE of what it means. Guys do this, too, sometimes, but typically only guys who are really adept at social maneuvering; girls tend to learn it earlier, and to have it down better, and to use it more, if my own personal experience is any indicator.

Or: the Fat Talk. You know about the Fat Talk, right? Lots of people have written about the Fat Talk already. For years, I thought this was some grody stereotype that you only found in male stand-up comedians' routines about how women are awful. But then I met women who actually did it: the thing where, before ordering dinner at a restaurant, you all talk about how you *should* order this and you absolutely *cannot* order that, because you are *so disgusting* and you *cannot* stick to your diet and eating a cheeseburger will literally send you *right straight to hell*, and if you are the girl who straight-up says she wants some nachos so covered in cheese and guacamole and various meats that they might as well not even have any chips involved – just a big mess of meats and milk fat and squished-up avocados, that is the experience for which you are aiming, and also it would help if the entire thing had sour cream all over it – well, you just might have earned yourself a Complinsult about how brave you are with your dietary habits, young lady.

The weird thing is that, in this scenario, it seems not to ultimately matter whether you get the cheeseburger or the nachos or whatever: what matters is the extensive ritual of saying bad things about yourself, and contradicting other ladies about the bad things they have said about themselves, and giving each other permission to order the nachos, before they're ordered. And if you don't get permission to order the nachos, if you're the one girl at the table who doesn't get contradicted when she says she's fat and shouldn't be allowed to eat what she wants, then you know something is up. You know someone at the table, or maybe everyone at the table, has a problem with you. Which is *why you don't place your order without doing it*: for a long time, I thought I was just demonstrating my good body image by ordering a cheeseburger and not participating in the Fat Talk, and then I sort of figured out that I was straight-up declaring that I was so hot I got to do whatever I wanted and was too insensitive to appease the body insecurities of my friends, who were (my actions declared) less hot than myself. I still think the Fat Talk is destructive and body-hating and stupid, and I don't want to do it, but the way I get around it is to talk with the girls I have lunch with about why I think it's destructive and body-hating. Not to just bypass it. Because that's how self-esteem, and self-promotion, and social status, tend to work with girls: it's a series of very subtle interactions in which you say you're not good enough so that other girls can tell you that you *are*.

Much of what I'm writing has been about women, I guess because I am actually responding to two blog-posts here, and the other one is by another lovely person by the name of Chally, who wrote on [The Importance of Women's Friendships](#) a while back. And I am in a place, right now in my current life, where I can say that at least two of the three people who matter most to me in my life, the people who represent my primary emotional support system and in whose emotional support systems I am also a primary factor, are women. That's two women with whom I have an agreement that they can call me at any time of the day or night simply because they need me, two women who could realistically drag me away from anything I might be doing to simply sit and eat nachos with them and help them through a rough day, two women who know more about me than probably the man I am living with knows in some respects, two women I rely upon to have the conversations that matter. And, at this point, most of my creative or career-related relationships are with women, and they're really important and vital and supportive, too. Which is great, because for a long time I was a person who only ever had *supremely toxic relationships* with women. I'm still parsing all of that stuff, actually, and it's really hard because I can't exempt myself from being one of the toxic parts of the equation. I was *gross*, in these relationships, even if I wasn't the only gross party. But when we talk about how women are taught not to self-promote, or believe in themselves to the extent necessary to self-promote, or the language whereby women race to the bottom on their way to the top, well: we can't take how women train other women out of the equation, in my opinion. Women can be primary agents of enforcing misogyny on each other, and women can be supremely effective at eviscerating or draining or punishing other women's confidence.

I don't think it's a coincidence that I started to be able to have functioning relationships with women at around the same time that I started to openly identify as a feminist. But it's not like the phenomenon of women being punished or scared out of demonstrating their own excellence magically vanishes, in feminist circles. For example, [there's this](#):

I have been watching for years with increasing dismay as the Movement consciously destroys anyone within it who stands out in any way. I had long hoped that this self-destructive tendency would wither away with time and experience. Thus I sympathized with, supported, but did not speak out about, the many women whose talents have been lost to the Movement because their attempts to use them had been met with hostility.

Or, you know:

What is "trashing," this colloquial term that expresses so much, yet explains so little? It is not disagreement; it is not conflict; it is not opposition. These are perfectly ordinary phenomena which, when engaged in mutually, honestly, and not excessively, are necessary to keep an organism or organization healthy and active. Trashing is a particularly vicious form of character assassination which amounts to psychological rape. It is manipulative, dishonest, and excessive. It is occasionally disguised by the rhetoric of honest conflict, or covered up by denying that any disapproval exists at all. But it is not done to expose disagreements or resolve differences. It is done to disparage and destroy.

The means vary. Trashing can be done privately or in a group situation; to one's face or behind one's back; through ostracism or open denunciation. The trasher may give you false reports of what (horrible things) others think of you; tell your friends false stories of what you think of them; interpret whatever you say or do in the most negative light; project unrealistic expectations on you so that when you fail to meet them, you become a "legitimate" target for anger; deny your perceptions of reality; or pretend you don't exist at all... Whatever methods are used, trashing involves a violation of one's integrity, a declaration of one's worthlessness, and an impugning of one's motives. In effect, what is attacked is not one's actions, or one's ideas, but

one's self.

Would it interest you to know, dear Reader, that the methods of girl destruction outlined in the previous paragraph – or the motives and goals attributed to them - are *precisely the same* as the methods used by adolescent girls, as detailed in *Odd Girl Out*? Would it, like, surprise you at all? Because it does not surprise me, in fact. Not even remotely. Having *gotten* the angry blog comments and e-mails and posts about me on other forums about how I am clearly a dirty sexy man-appeasing sell-out who does private lap dances on Mary Daly's grave for blog hits (PATRIARCHY!) this seems like... just, really, not shocking at all.

But, leaving all this aside for the moment – although, do you ever really get to leave it aside? HECK NO, would be my answer – let's just TALK about the man part of the equation, shall we? Let's just talk about the fact that, growing up, I knew many women who were told to lose intellectual arguments with their boyfriends *on purpose*, so that the guys wouldn't be threatened by them. Let's talk about the fact that, growing up, I considered "smart" and "attractive" to be mutually opposed, and therefore considered myself unattractive for no real physical reason. (Because I thought I was smart. It's not like there was *no* arrogance, in this particular variant of self-loathing.) Let's talk about the fact that adult female friends have told me they only want to date dudes more successful than themselves, because dating dudes less successful than themselves always sends them through some wacky hell-ride of Let's Take My Girlfriend Down a Peg that they'd rather not endure again. Let's talk about the women I know who are successful, in traditionally manly fields, and who spend a tremendous amount of time constructing "just one of the boys" personas to assuage the guys and make guys feel that their privilege isn't threatened, or who spend an enormous amount of time crafting personas that are less smart and strong and opinionated and accomplished than they really are, just so that people (meaning guys – although, you know, girls too) won't be scared of them. Let's talk about how many times a woman gets called "intimidating" just for being correct, and for not seeming unsure about how correct she is, in the course of an average lifetime. Let's talk about the weird hostility that a girl faces if she walks into a room of guys and doesn't seem dead set on making them all like her and feel like superheroes. Let's talk about the [endless wave of articles](#) about how weird it is when women are more successful than their husbands, or how being too successful means you won't have a man in your life at all. (Because, clearly, men are the goal for EVERYONE. I'm not even touching that one.) Let's talk about that. Or, at least, take a moment to think about it. Because it is a big deal.

Most of what I'm describing falls into the category of "personal" – it's about friendships, sex, intimacy – and not into the realm of "career," where self-promotion, no matter how you feel about it, *is* in fact important. But my point is this: before any woman even walks into her first job interview, she has received a lifetime of conditioning, from men and other women alike, intended to make her downplay or disguise or feel secretly ashamed of her own talents or exceptional qualities or qualifications or potential. It's every day for your entire life, that you get that training. We're taught not to succeed; we're taught that success is failure. So, you know: exaggerating our own qualifications? It goes against the grain, most of the time, to even fucking *admit that we have* qualifications in the first place.

Here's the part where I more or less go off the rails and talk about animal behavior, because: have you ever seen how dogs handle conflict? Like, in the park or at the dog run or something? If a dog has an issue with another dog, and is reasonably convinced that it can attain dominance over that dog, it will get scrappy and start a fight. Or, it will participate in a fight with the dog that's picking on it. But if a dog is picked on, and it feels for whatever reason that it will lose, what it does is to roll over and expose its throat and belly. It's a gesture that says, *here: you can kill me if you want to, here are all the soft vulnerable parts*. It's intended to appease the aggressor in the exchange, make it feel that there is no challenge or danger coming from this direction, so that they won't escalate the violence. It's a way of, essentially, saving your life by offering it up. Actions like these aren't uncommon, amongst pack animals who operate in a hierarchical fashion; they're called "submissive gestures." Or, if you're a human being, they're called "femininity."

Which doesn't mean that we don't, as I said, need to get over this particular wackiness. Because I don't think Shirky is *wrong*, at least not about this one thing: it does hurt us, it does stop us from accomplishing as much as we have to, it does keep us silent and in second place (or third, or fourth, or) when in reality we could be rocking first place pretty darn hard if we wanted to. We have to stop punishing other women for promoting themselves; we have to stop punishing ourselves for promoting ourselves; we have to somehow convince dudes to stop punishing us for promoting ourselves, and Lord knows THAT'S been a fun ride thus far. I don't think it's necessary to act the fool and be a dick in the public square about it, because a person who *has* to be the center of attention is just as fucked and stocked-up on Serious Issues as a person who *cannot* be, but, you know: a journey of a thousand miles begins with acting slightly more confident in a job interview than you actually are. Because, even after reviewing all of these various reasons why a person who is a lady might choose not to do it, I can see that they're scary, and I can see that they're sad, and I can see that they're really tough to overcome. But I can also see that acting against this socialization is a feminist act. Although it is also a feminist act at which I kind of suck, at this particular moment in time.

This was written by Sady. Posted on

Wednesday, January 27, 2010, at 2:25 pm.

Filed under [Uncategorized](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#). Follow comments here with the [RSS feed](#). Both comments and trackbacks are currently closed.

53 Comments

1. [Laima](#) wrote:

Hi Sady,

Don't know if it'll make you feel any better, but I think I'm about 15 or so years older than you (I'm 43), and I'm **still** struggling with these issues

all the time.

It does not help that I've been unemployed for almost 6 months, and under-employed for the last 2 years. I've been trying to rely on my spouse for that validation/encouragement of my shitty self-esteem, but he's not very good at it. He seems to think being confident is something that you just *do* – that I should just “know” I'm fabulous and act like it. You know, like *he* does!

With almost *no* external validation, though, and a very small social network, it's really difficult.

Thanks for listening. (Long time reader, but I mostly lurk.)

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 3:52 pm | [Permalink](#)

2. Maggie wrote:

While I really don't see a lot of the “ohh I shouldn't get the X because I'll be so fat ohhh nooo” sort of thing, I definitely have huge difficulties accepting praise.

I tied for top graduate in a program I took; I told my mom and she said “I'm so proud of you! That's great”. I said “But if I'd worked a little harder I wouldn't have tied!”

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 3:59 pm | [Permalink](#)

3. Fnord Prefect wrote:

Oh lordisa. My response to Shirky's article can be summed up as, briefly, “This is news?” for exactly the reasons you state. I have been doing this experiment wherein I no longer apologize for things that are not my fault, and you will not be surprised to hear that I am more frequently addressed as “difficult” (to put it euphamistically) than in the halcyon days when I acquiesced and ate a little piece of my own liver every day. It is amazing how fast the hammer comes down on a lady who dares to not apologize, for all the girl-power(tm) Beatrix Kiddos in pop culture. All of this is basically to say, I agree. Thanks for saying it better and at greater length.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 4:10 pm | [Permalink](#)

4. [Marste](#) wrote:

I swear I am going to forward this to every single woman I know. Sady, this was freakin' BRILLIANT.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 4:42 pm | [Permalink](#)

5. Kelly wrote:

Sometimes I am just certain that you are the best writer in the whole world. I love you. And those nachos sound awesome lets get some.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 4:55 pm | [Permalink](#)

6. [Tavi](#) wrote:

It's probably redundant to say this but you are AWESOME. Thank you,

Sady.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 5:33 pm | [Permalink](#)

7. [jfruh](#) wrote:

Here is honest question for ladies on social ethics: what do you do if you are a feminist dude (or any dude I guess) who is eating with ladies (not necessarily with whom you are having the relations with, but, heck, that too) and they start the "Oh, I cannot eat this I am so fat" routine?

Obviously the correct answer is not "Damn straight tubby" but ... but I don't want to get into the little dance described above for exactly the reasons described above either. A friend of mine who I used to hang out with used to do this literally every time we went out together and it made me so discombobulated; I fear that I was probably too brusque with her about it but I never knew exactly what to do to short circuit it.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 6:29 pm | [Permalink](#)

8. Brenda wrote:

now i want a plate of nachos.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 6:35 pm | [Permalink](#)

9. jennifer wrote:

well JFRUH, i'm an asshole lady and when girlfriends of my acquaintance start with the "oh i shouldn't eat this routine" i simply respond with "then don't". this may be why my best friend is another asshole lady who the last time we got together ate a chicken pot pie that was served IN A BUCKET while i pounded down a double cheeseburger.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 7:18 pm | [Permalink](#)

10. ChelseaWantsOut wrote:

A couple of things:

-You have created within me a LONGING for NACHOS which must be satisfied.

-You've seriously just made my entire life from kindergarten on make sense. Thank you.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 7:32 pm | [Permalink](#)

11. Sady wrote:

@Jfruh: Well! I acknowledge that this may involve gendery differences, what with you being A Dude and all. But I am A Lady who (a) has some lady friends who do this, and (b) knows some dudes who do this, although this is less about the specific lady-issues involving body weight and more about general cultural body-weight stuff. When I am with a dude who does this (and this has happened a few times, generally with dudes I am pretty close with and/or dating, since guys, in my experience, don't do this unless you know them really well) my response has been along the lines of, "yeah, but it's SATURDAY," or, "yeah, but the cheese fries here are SO GOOD," or, "yeah, but aren't YOU hung over?

Wouldn't the cheese fries HELP with this? Is there any reason NOT to

have the cheese fries, right now?" Basically, I stress the virtues and joys of cheese-heavy eating, and thereby bypass the whole body-hating part of the discussion in favor of stressing appetite. When I'm with a lady – and I acknowledge that it might seem weird to do this, as a dude, since you might not be coming from the same life experience and are not socialized to do the Fat Talk to the same extent – I have a talk that is like, "lady, you don't have to downplay yourself in front of me! You know I think you are super-cute and amazing! And you know that you and I would both enjoy having some of these cheese fries right now!" Either of these, I think, might work for a dude. Because both are not totally disrespectful of ladies' insecurities, but both are stressing the enjoyment of the meal in question over and above weirdness about what foods you are allowed to eat. That's my take, anyway!

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 7:34 pm | [Permalink](#)

12. [Femputerist](#) wrote:

Oh boy do I relate to everything in this post. It's interesting that it's often the men in my life who encourage me to do better, who assure me that I'm actually intelligent and have something to contribute to the world. By the same token though, it tends to be men that I *look* to for that, seeing them as the final authority on Whether I Am Smart Or Not.

I'd be interested to see you write some more about toxic relationships between women, and how you go about, um, detoxing them? Because I have a lot of trouble getting along with women outside a very small group who I have a lot in common with, and I think the things you talked about in this post have a LOT to do with that.

Thanks for the amazing read.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 7:37 pm | [Permalink](#)

13. [Kelly](#) wrote:

@Jfruh

"Obviously the correct answer is not "Damn straight tubby"

Why not? Jeebus.

No, that would be insensitive and wrong and perhaps triggering to those with or recovering from EDs. But I still sometimes feel like saying it.

Maybe someone could get away with it – it if was just SO OBVIOUS he was outing the behavior of food shame/policing and not having any of it, and not that he/she was a jerk who actually thought he had the right to determine who was too fat, or whatever.

But I dunno. Sometimes I'm so tired of the world's food policing and dieting and stuff and I just want to go ahead and say the UNFORGIVABLE or whatever, because I'm tired of it being a way of life so many women (and men) live with and it's still happening and if anything so many people reward that kind of talk.

Let's see... so in real life when my ladyfriends do this I think I say either A. nothing (because usually they don't give a shit what I think, they're going through their ritual), or B. ["Turns out, food is good for you and if](#)

[you don't eat it you die.](#)” Maybe it’s an attitude thing: because I am pretty light with it. I have opinions and would love to elucidate if they ask (they don’t).

Sady, I really liked this article; thank you. I think I am fortunate in that my ladyfriend relationships have not been too toxic. However... I still do that whole, “there’s such a thing as too much self-promotion” bit – internally – and I know deep-down I’m harder on women than men. Thanks for a good reminder at examining that stuff.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 8:41 pm | [Permalink](#)

14. William wrote:

Once again, Sady, an awesome post.

After Shirky’s rant, I and a dear friend, also male, got into an argument about employee salaries. I — raised mostly by women — strive to make sure anybody on my team gets paid what they’re worth. He, on the other hand, pays people what they ask for. If they don’t ask for more, they don’t get it.

He thought he was being perfectly fair, while I thought he was being a sexist jerk. He’ll come round eventually, but it will be decades at least before we stamp out his approach. Until then, all people too shy to ask for what they deserve (many women, some men, and certainly me) need to learn that skill. Or at least pick bosses who will do it for you.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 9:52 pm | [Permalink](#)

15. Gator wrote:

A smart woman a generation older than I once summed up the awful conformity-enforcing, take-you-down-a-peg female adolescent mess in two words: Girl Mafia. Thanks to you, Sady, I now have “Complinsult” to add to the Girl Mafia glossary.

In happier news, I few years ago I finally learned to gracefully accept a (genuine) compliment. In the past, when someone said something nice about my grades or work, I would deflect the praise and downplay the accomplishment. (For god’s sake, don’t act stuck up!) Now I simply say, “Thank you, I worked hard on that.” It’s not quite self-promotion, but it’s a step in the right direction.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 9:56 pm | [Permalink](#)

16. [jfruh](#) wrote:

Thank you for the advice, all ladies! I sort of forgot one potential complication, which is you are a straight dude dealing with a straight lady, even if you are only friends, discussions about the lady’s appearances can be kind of fraught, especially if you have sometimes have the feeling that the lady might not want to just be friends, and you do not necessarily reciprocate. Cough. But still, I like the technique of emphasizing the awesomeness of cheese, because life without cheese isn’t worth living.

Wednesday, January 27, 2010 at 10:50 pm | [Permalink](#)

17. [Emmy](#) wrote:

Sady, I too have a fascination with the adolescent girl friendships, though for me I can only study them for a certain amount of time per day before I have to lay off lest I have one of those “actually I never graduated middle school” dreams.

Short note on the Fat Talk: I’m a baker. I work at a lady-owned, almost completely lady-staffed bakery. I see the Fat Talk every single day, MULTIPLE TIMES a day, and half the time it seems so normal and I’m right in there doing it too and the other half I just look at my life like, “what.” There’s this little dance whenever there’s a new cake to taste or even if someone just has a yummy scrap of something left over, like “oh no, not more sugar I’m really just sick of sugar, well all right OH GOD SO GOOD, okay I’m stopping now really.” And it’s ridiculous, because of course the cake is good! It’s my FUCKING JOB to make good cake and I obviously care about the quality of the product I make FOR A LIVING. But there’s that routine you’ve gotta go through, and once one person cracks and starts eating the cake it’s like we all have permission to take a bite and then we can all reassure each other it was the right decision. And it’s ridiculous, because obviously we all enjoy good food, but it’s socially important to know and publicly state that good food is bad for you.

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 12:09 am | [Permalink](#)

18. Sara wrote:

Sometimes I feel bad for saying I hate cheese, because I feel like I’m engaging in Fat Talk. Last night, I actually did have nachos! And they were good, but it was too much cheese. And I didn’t want them, but I didn’t want anyone to feel self-conscious about eating them!

So I end up having to eat shit I hate. Does anyone ever win in these scenarios?

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 4:57 am | [Permalink](#)

19. Kriss wrote:

This suddenly puts into context the horrible behaviour I observed at one UK National Union of Students Women’s Conference. So factionalised, and all aimed at pulling down the current Women’s Officer (who was perfectly competent but not part of the clique) in favour of the one who subsequently got elected. Horrible and it put me off going to things like that, or speaking up at them.

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 6:55 am | [Permalink](#)

20. [Gnatalby](#) wrote:

Fantastic post. And, like many above, I reeeeeeeally want a big plate of nachos right now, but it’s not going to happen, not because of self-loathing but because of the lack of nachos in the country in which I live.

I too have stopped participating in the evil foods talk, but I hadn't really thought about the message I was sending with that, perhaps I will try your effort.

I have awesome female friends, who are very supportive of each other, but are not necessarily super aware of feminist issues, so a big challenge for me is lady bonding by trashing another woman. Like, if I'm out with a friend and she points to some woman down the street and says, "Wow, she shouldn't be wearing that." I don't know what to do! Because what I want to say is: "Maybe if you stopped being so judgmental of others you'd stop hating yourself so much." But that is just unbearably smug sounding. I've taken to just complimenting something else about the woman in question, like, "But her hair is really shiny!" But I don't know if that actually does anything. I especially hate this when women talk this way in front of men, since it just adds fuel to the myth that women are the worst ever and so destructive while men are just sensible.

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 8:37 am | [Permalink](#)

21. Sixwing wrote:

This is so on. This was a huge part of the experience of middle school.

One of my least favorite things to do is the Fat Talk. I hate them so much, and since many of my friends and family are either Point Watching or Dieting or whatever, it happens a lot. I frequently try to invert it, or subvert it, or just turn it on its ear to expose how ridiculous it is, or call it Calvinball, but it gets wearing after a time.

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 9:30 am | [Permalink](#)

22. [Elizabeth](#) wrote:

I think I'm going to make a note of this, and have my niece read it in a few years, so that she can avoid (with luck) some of what I went through along those lines. I still catch self-deprecating phrases coming out of my mouth now and again.

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 9:54 am | [Permalink](#)

23. GryphonCat wrote:

Here via an LJ friend's link — and glad I came!

I was picked on incessantly in middle and high school and it never occurred to me why. I had a nice family and I was tall even then and I'd lived a lot of different places — so I thought it was just because I was different. But the confidence thing is true — it was always part of me as a kid (and I'm rebuilding it). I feel better about myself now!

@Sara, "I hate cheese" isn't fat talk if you add "But I love 'X'!" That has the pitfall of possibly seeming like you're dissing someone's snack of choice, so you can say "Cheese doesn't agree with me" instead.

Talking people down as a bonding act is an outgrowth of a common bonding act I've seen: complaining. Apparently it's easier to bond over

what we don't like than over what we do like. Sadly, it makes for shallow friendships.... I try hard to find out what my online and RL friends like and share my likes with them. I've learned of some really awesome music this way, and gotten to share things with my friends they never would have found otherwise.

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 10:43 am | [Permalink](#)

24. [Libby](#) wrote:

"Odd Girl Out" is a great book – I read it a few years ago.

Thanks for writing this article. It's eye-opening. This post echoes a lot of what my best friend – another successful female – and I have been talking about for years: the insidious dynamic among female relationships.

I am eager to read more from you. Bravo!

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 10:45 am | [Permalink](#)

25. [emjaybee](#) wrote:

Man, this is depressing, but it does help crystallize my lack of female friends who are not on the Feminist Internets. I got through school by just opting out and going mostly "friendless" after a few friendships detonated along these lines. It was frikkin' lonely, but I did get to keep my self-respect. But I never did really find a way to be friends with many other women. I am sad about it, but frankly have no desire to have my self-esteem bulldozed again, so I mostly hang out with enlightened dudes.

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 12:53 pm | [Permalink](#)

26. [Dolorosa](#) wrote:

I've been reading Tiger Beatdown for about a year now, and never commented. But this post articulates things I've been thinking about and feeling my whole life and yet that I was unable to articulate.

I guess all I want to say is an emphatic, very grateful, 'thank you'. Thank you so much for this post.

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 1:57 pm | [Permalink](#)

27. [Lily](#) wrote:

I love this post. I love this post! I want to frame it and hang it over my bed. So many points here had me nodding- the apologies over the menu, the compulsive subversion of your own talent & worth in professional type conversations. It makes me think actually of the ultimate lesson of Cinderella- don't complain, do what you're told, sleep in the cinders and your goodness will magically shine forth somehow (pumpkins? singing mice?) & net you social dominance.

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 1:59 pm | [Permalink](#)

28. [FW](#) wrote:

When I was that age, bullies and the victims of those bullies did not eat

lunch together and talk about their weight. I was bullied. I did not eat lunch with the girls who bullied me, ever. Not even nachos.

Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 4:44 pm | [Permalink](#)

29. [Sonya](#) wrote:

I love this article! I feel like it says everything I have been yelling (yes yelling cause no one listens) for years. I have brightly colored hair at all times (I like bright colors), I dress like a pinup girl (i think it is fun), I am a successful hair artist, and I am a highpriestess who just founded the FIRST LEGAL Pagan Church in the city of Memphis, Tennessee.

I am so tired of people telling me how brave I am to look like I do, or asking me why do I look like I do....or better yet, is my teenager embarrassed of me? No, he isnt! He is proud he has a mom, who is well educated, politically, and socially active...and then there are other people of my faith...they all look the same...and guess what? I do not look like them...at all. I do not look like I do to "GET ATTENTION" I express myself in my clothing and hair, because life is short, and I want some enjoyment in in because I work my ass off!

Thank you so much for this article, and yes, my girlfriends help me get by every day too...and you know what? They never comment on my appearance!

Friday, January 29, 2010 at 8:07 am | [Permalink](#)

30. Liz wrote:

Sady, I wonder if you've read "Women Don't Ask" by Linda Babcock. It discusses how men and women are socialized differently to negotiate (or not negotiate) and the staggering differences those skills (or lack thereof) can have over a lifetime.

Friday, January 29, 2010 at 11:46 am | [Permalink](#)

31. Anne wrote:

Thanks for the great post, Sady. As usual, it's made me turn more of a critical and thoughtful eye on myself.

I'm currently a graduate student in chemical biology. I'm pretty sure I'm smart. I mean, the objective facts would suggest that, right? I gained admission to a top-15-school doctoral program in a science, and I've worked my ass off my whole life to get where I am. I do consider myself a smart individual, and I recognize it as pretty much my greatest strength. However, I find that without fail, I underestimate myself. I have what the one therapist I ever had called "Impostor Syndrome" – I feel that somehow, through some kind of elaborate talent at fakery, I have hoodwinked my way into my current position. *Objectively*, this is entirely false – I am a two time (high school/college) valedictorian, and I'm pretty sure I didn't tamper with my academic records. But even right this moment, I am squirming with discomfort at extolling my own achievements. And that reverberates through my whole life. When I got a glowing A+ review from my first lab advisor, I was genuinely shocked – I wanted to ask him, are you sure? Did you really pay attention to what I

was doing? Didn't you notice that I didn't read 10 papers a day or remember every little detail I read? Didn't you notice I'm a FAILURE??

Ugh. It disgusts me, but that attitude is so internalized that I can't get away from it, no matter how much external validation I get. And I have been validated MY WHOLE LIFE – I went to a deeply fantastic high school where I was never bullied and had some extremely supportive teachers who are still friends of mine. Yet I still managed to be miserable and internalize this stupid attitude. Which just goes to show how astonishingly pervasive it truly is.

I've been thinking about my career options, and I'm very wary about becoming an academic investigator because of the amount of politics and money-grubbing it requires. I was talking to my cousin (30s, male) about it, and he said "Well, it comes down to one thing. Do you like to promote yourself?" and I said "Hell no." and he said "Then it's probably not for you." That felt like a revelation to me, simply because he put a name to one of the key sources of my misgivings.

But now I'm thinking that maybe I need to stop considering that fear of self-promotion as part of me, and instead look at it as a flaw that I would like to overcome, and work harder at. But like you said, that's not exactly easy. I don't know if I could ever get to the point where I could run a lab and be able to write grants that say, "Look, I have the greatest idea ever. You should give me \$500,000 to work on it." That thought terrifies me beyond belief.

So maybe it really isn't for me, but the notion that it's because of a mutable part of me, not an innate part, is a little bit novel, and I thank you for making me think about it a little harder.

Friday, January 29, 2010 at 1:17 pm | [Permalink](#)

32. [Anodyne Lite](#) wrote:

This is one of the best things I've ever read in my life about plain old female experience and daily life.

I've been bullied by women basically my entire life. I never understood what was going on when I was a teen, but as I got older, it all sort of clicked one day at work when a female colleague asked me, horrified, "are you going to eat chicken AND macaroni and cheese for lunch?". And I hadn't even given it a second thought. I'd be doing "girl" all wrong since day one; I shamelessly ate whatever I wanted and never made comments about hating my body, I was accelerated several grades throughout grammar/high school and wasn't afraid to challenge guys in debates. I got the best college scholarship at my school. I never feigned helplessness, fear of insects and reptiles, or cutesy ignorance to seem less "threatening" to guys...

And the weirdest part was that I never had any trouble at all making guy friends. Funny, since everything about me was supposed to scream "undatable shrew" according to Ms. Manners and The Rules. It was and still is other women who constantly pick pick pick at everything I say and do and wear and enjoy, though.

Quite honestly, I've learned to avoid friendships with women. And that sucks and needs to be rectified. I just don't know where to start.

Friday, January 29, 2010 at 8:17 pm | [Permalink](#)

33. [Gnatalby](#) wrote:

When I got a glowing A+ review from my first lab advisor, I was genuinely shocked – I wanted to ask him, are you sure?

Anne, I had a rueful laugh of identifying right here. When I was in college my Latin prof asked me to stay after class to tell me I'd won a Classics award and I was practically shitting myself all class because I thought she was going to tell me I was failing her class. :/

Saturday, January 30, 2010 at 8:14 am | [Permalink](#)

34. Joanna NY wrote:

Speaking as a slightly older lady myself (coughnearly50cough), I think you are mostly correct in your description, if not necessarily in your analysis. I am one of those innately self-confident girls who took all that underground early on, due to social pressure (but, yk, it's not just girls; boys do it too). I mostly regret that now and have been coming out of my shell (well, more or less since my early 20s when I decide, "Fuck this shit! What's the point? I DO know what I'm talking about.")

I think it is possible to find friends who will support (and I am very fortunate in that I have sisters who support me too).

I also think that it's not an easy path to follow and you need to be prepared for other people (mainly, again, women) to subtly and at times, not so subtly, make you feel bad about it (like the girlfriend who stopped speaking to me after I got married—we had been EXTREMELY close before—and then when I ran into her by accident a few years later, insisted on taking me for a coffee and explaining to me that she had done so out of concern for me, since being married to this particular man had "ruined" me and "brought me down." And I was all like, yeah, so me being no longer panic-stricken and anorexic and a complete mess doesn't suit you, huh?)

As for the fat dance, I always just say yeah, well, otoh, you probably DO DESERVE IT! Cause that's what people say to me and it takes very little for me to be persuaded.

And no, I am not skinny or even then but most of the time it doesn't stop me.

But, honestly, even if you are naturally the confident type, this all takes work, and time. But, It Can Be Done. You can be happy, and self-confident, and eat with guilt, and have a successful career, and good friends and a loving partner. You just have to understand that it may not look or feel like what you initially imagined, and you may have to go through a lot of discomfort and feelings of guilt to get there.

I hope this doesn't sound like, "JUST PULL YOURSELF OUT OF YOUR

GENDER BY YOUR OWN BOOTSTRAPS” because it’s not what I mean.

Anyway, I have probably written way too much and bored you all to tears, so here’s a cookie if you managed to read this far (yes, this is sarcasm).

Saturday, January 30, 2010 at 9:58 am | [Permalink](#)

35. Joanna NY wrote:

Speaking as a slightly older lady myself (coughnearly50cough), I think you are mostly correct in your description, if not necessarily in your analysis. I am one of those innately self-confident girls who took all that underground early on, due to social pressure (but, yk, it’s not just girls; boys do it too). I mostly regret that now and have been coming out of my shell (well, more or less since my early 20s when I decide, “Fuck this shit! What’s the point? I DO know what I’m talking about.”)

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And no, I am not skinny or even thin but most of the time it doesn’t stop me.

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I hope this doesn’t sound like, “JUST PULL YOURSELF OUT OF YOUR GENDER BY YOUR OWN BOOTSTRAPS” because it’s not what I mean.

Anyway, I have probably written way too much and bored you all to tears, so here’s a cookie if you managed to read this far (yes, this is sarcasm).

Saturday, January 30, 2010 at 10:00 am | [Permalink](#)

36. [Eva](#) wrote:

Thank you for writing this. The part about girls and women pulling each other down for having the temerity to be confident cleared some shit up for me that I've been struggling with for a long time.

Saturday, January 30, 2010 at 12:10 pm | [Permalink](#)

37. Alix wrote:

Well, that certainly clarified some things about middle school! I'm a midfifties lady, and I too have imposter syndrome. It's only now that I really realize I could have gone for that MD degree back when I had the energy and desire.

Sunday, January 31, 2010 at 3:08 pm | [Permalink](#)

38. Lyndsay wrote:

holy shit, this is why I thought I didn't like being friends with girls. Thank you for writing it all down... this is incredible. Shiiiiit.

Sunday, January 31, 2010 at 8:48 pm | [Permalink](#)

39. Chai Latte wrote:

YES. THIS.

mass glompage

Monday, February 1, 2010 at 5:20 pm | [Permalink](#)

40. hn wrote:

loosely related anecdote: A girl in school, whom I was in love with, because of her sophistication, was so incredibly self-deprecating, all the time, that we were barely able to talk about anything personal, since she would just default to tell me how great I was, compared to her, quoting, among other things, a well-known misogynist comic (Mario Barth. If you know German or Google Translate, get a bottomless pukebucket and read his stuff). When I told her that this guy was in fact misogynist and outright hated her, she asked me to explain what that misogyny thing was exactly, since she had never heard of such a thing.

She's a doctor now, I'm a useless slacker and I still hope she was just having a laugh at me

Monday, February 1, 2010 at 6:49 pm | [Permalink](#)

41. [Tadhg](#) wrote:

This was a fantastic piece, thank you for writing it.

I'm always really saddened by the fact that women are pressured to hide their intelligence or knowledge. I hate the fact that many guys contribute to this, but it's even more depressing to consider that many women do also as part of gender policing.

I wrote a longer response here:

[Confidence, Status, and Women Undermining Women](#)

Tuesday, February 2, 2010 at 12:32 am | [Permalink](#)

42. Karen wrote:

LOL...I love your post!! You've stated most eloquently and enlightened me on several points that have puzzled and bewildered me about many females I've encountered.

I truly enjoyed reading your thoughts and will most definitely be sharing this with my friends. 😊

Tuesday, February 2, 2010 at 2:56 am | [Permalink](#)

43. [MarinaS](#) wrote:

Not to take away from your insightful piece, but where are the boys in all this?

I remember very vividly how much policin and enforcement there was from the male side of the classroom of all of these behaviours. How quickly standing up to a boy turned into a "reputation" – forcing your female peers, willy nilly, to shun you lest they be tarred with the same brush (and how quickly a reputation turns into sexual harrasement, so the danger of being associated with you is not merely social).

Look at groups of teenagers sometimes. Look at how the boys hold their girlfriends – clasp them, almost Nelson-choke them. Look at them horsing around on the bus and you will see shoves, slaps, hair pulling, pinching, having phones and shoes and bags and articles of clothing snatched and thrown on the ground or passed around among the boys out of the girl's reach.

Or listen to them talk; listen to the boys tell the girls they are too fat, that they'd never date them, that they shouldn't be wearing that outfit, underminign their opinions, stifling their challenges, shouting down their protests, *training* them, like dogs, with carrot-and-stick, to not stand out.

Oh and by the way – boys pick on the most confident girls, too. And they have more scope for escalation, because it's considered OK for them to enforce their bullying with violence from hair pulling in the sandpit ("he just likes you, darling!") through bra strap snapping in junior high and right into college assault and adulthood knocking her about. So the life of a girl who doesn't bow down becomes not only progressively lonelier, but progressively more dangerous, too.

Girls can be – and are – absolutely bloody horrible to each other. But they exist in an environment that screams at them over huge superbowl sized speakers every minute of every day that getting boys to like them is the number one most important thing – the only important thing – in their lives. And also that boys are smarter, more important, more valid than they are. And that all other girls are their enemies in striving for the attention of the boys. The Girl Mafia/Queen Bees & Wannabees dynamic descends directly from that and carries on into adulthood, which is why I think that your analysis is interesting and compelling, but incomplete because it lacks context of how this dynamic you describe emerges in

the first place.

There's a great book by an academic called Deborah Cameron, called "The Myth of Mars and Venus". It mostly deals with debunking stereotypes about communication styles, but it also contains a good overview of how the sexes start becoming segregated at the onset of puberty, and the dynamics and modes of discourse girls develop in order to be able to function in the new competitive landscape.

Tuesday, February 2, 2010 at 3:45 pm | [Permalink](#)

44. phio gistic wrote:

Doesn't anyone remember this study? It's only a couple of years old: "Social incentives for gender differences in the propensity to initiate negotiations: Sometimes it does hurt to ask" Hannah Riley Bowles, Linda Babcock and Lei Lai

"Four experiments show that gender differences in the propensity to initiate negotiations may be explained by differential treatment of men and women when they attempt to negotiate. [...] Evaluators penalized female candidates more than male candidates for initiating negotiations."

Women know very well that they might be penalized if they are perceived as "self-serving." Men are not penalized in the same way. Saying there are fewer famous female painters, golfers, computer scientists etc., because women are cowardly, or because those other women bitches keep them down, is laughable.

Thursday, February 4, 2010 at 12:05 pm | [Permalink](#)

45. [Hershele Ostropoler](#) wrote:

Ah. This really gets, better than I've been able to articulate, to what bothers me about the Lean Cuisine spots. The ones where thin women are bragging to each other about how they deprive themselves, and one confesses to eating an actual meal of real food — only, psych!, it's just Lean Cuisine, and she's still socially acceptable.

Thursday, February 4, 2010 at 12:12 pm | [Permalink](#)

46. Lila wrote:

My absolute favorite Complinsult: My boyfriend's mom is eating dinner with us at a restaurant. She is a small person, I am not. She knows I have struggled with eating disorders, and have had issues with my recent medication related weight gain. When I'm full (about halfway through the dish), I stop, saying "If I eat any more I'm going to burst." Her response? "You eat so much less than I do. Life is so unfair." Yes. To my face. Clueless bf missed it completely.

Friday, February 5, 2010 at 1:02 pm | [Permalink](#)

47. annejumps wrote:

Great post and comments, but I have to agree the most with Marinas here.

Saturday, February 6, 2010 at 1:56 pm | [Permalink](#)

48. [Sage Ross](#) wrote:

My reaction when I read Shirky's piece was: the ladies (and their socialized behaviors) are less the problem here.

There's a big gap between what describe as a good goal here and what Shirky does ("acting slightly more confident in a job interview than you actually are" vs. lying your way into a job because you think you could pick it up on the fly). In general, people are going to be better off if we stick to the former and avoid the latter—even if the lying, self-promoting, macho approach is a workable, maybe even optimal, strategy for the people like you and Shirky who are much more talented than 99.999% of us. (Seriously, if I had to name my three favorite writers, you and Shirky would be two of them.) Cuz you two are role model for other would-be world-changers, and if everybody went around acting like Shirky says women should do more, it would just make it all the harder for honest people with accurate views of their own strengths and weaknesses to compete, and all the more necessary to be a self-aggrandizing ass.

In my experience (as a dude and a grad student, among other things) academics (among other professional, no doubt) have these powerful norms of acting more competent and knowledgeable and sure of their knowledge than they are, basically all the time when they're around each other. (This doesn't usually apply to grad students when they are only with other grad students.) But successful ladies are much more likely to be transparent about the limits of their knowledge and their work than successful dudes. And maybe that means dudes do better climbing academic ladders, but it also means the value of their work is lessened because there's no acknowledgement of shortcomings.

Obviously, the kinds of mutually assured destruction you describe adolescent girls putting each other and themselves through is terrible, and to be avoided. But in many of the women (and men) I admire most, that feminine norm of self-abasement seems to have been reforged into taoist-style humility: "[a wise woman] acts without claiming the results as hers; [she] achieves [her] merit and does not rest (arrogantly) in it: — [she] does not wish to display [her] superiority."

Wednesday, February 10, 2010 at 6:52 am | [Permalink](#)

49. J wrote:

I think you just saved my day. I love you.

Also: compliments. Trying to figure them out makes my head hurt, so I'm just taking them literally as compliments, even though I know I SHOULD read between the lines and feel bad and insecure like a good girl. But I really hate compliments and so can't be bothered spending any more energy on them than necessary.

(Also it's a lot of fun to watch people's faces when you do this, and the little implied insult just slides off like you're made of teflon.)

"Thank you! I love this outfit too, I feel great tonight, and I'm having so much fun wearing this."

Or, in response to Lila's boyfriend's mom: "Yes. Life is unfair sometimes."

All said in a friendly tone of course, and then quickly change the topic of the conversation.

Thursday, February 18, 2010 at 9:10 am | [Permalink](#)

50. Heather wrote:

yep, I know the 'stand-out therefore bullied'. and that was at a girl's school designed to produce over-achievers. You weren't bullied if you were an over-achiever, (grades/looks/sports) but you were bullied if you were confident about not fitting in. Sad to say, that only stopped when I punched the bully in front of the whole class. Mind you, I did come out of that school thinking I was dumb. Work, tend to get bullied for speaking my mind and therefore went out of my way to be known as the difficult member of staff who refuses to play the game. Thus I get a modicum of respect as the person people come to for problem-solving but no promotion.

Re:fat issue? I once butted in on a 'omg I'm so fat/calorie discussion' by going 'I eat full-fat, don't calorie count and just exercise – why don't you try that?' and immediately got a sneering whiplash from all of them designed to take my head off of 'Rub it in/Don't be so superior/Yes, well, you're YOU' as though keeping to a reasonable diet and exercise regime (it turns out I was eating healthier and less junk than the faddy diet moaners) and having a realistic attitude to my weight was wrong.

Friday, March 5, 2010 at 8:27 am | [Permalink](#)

51. TISHA wrote:

One of the problems with self-promotion is that many girls learn to dread receiving praise, not only because it would be stuck up of them, but also because you never know when that compliment is actually an insult. I think perhaps people are more accustomed to feeling envy than admiration.

Sunday, April 4, 2010 at 8:44 pm | [Permalink](#)

52. LR wrote:

This comment just totally bowled me over:

"Let's talk about how many times a woman gets called "intimidating" just for being correct, and for not seeming unsure about how correct she is, in the course of an average lifetime."

I get called intimidating *all the time*, mostly by women, and whenever I'd ask people why, I always got vague responses about aggression that never seemed to make any sense. I never attack people in arguments, just their ideas, so I couldn't understand where the problem was. I've always understood it had something to do with being confident, and that being a woman didn't help, but I don't think my mind ever quite clicked on it the way you just described. You are so freaking correct it make my head spin. Now I'm even more pissed about every demeaning thing I've heard since kindergarten – and goodness knows that anger will only make me all the more intimidatng.

Thursday, June 24, 2010 at 10:07 am | [Permalink](#)

53. Veronika wrote:

“Complisults” is such a great term. I could plug the oil spill with the amount of them I received in my teenage years alone.

No one writes with more truth or incisive clarity about social issues than Sady. I've never read anyone else as cohesive, funny, and painfully honest. Your writing always makes me think and you've helped me more than I can say.

Your friend is damn right when he says you can, and should, hold a higher opinion of your abilities and promote the hell out of them and yourself. I love me some Tiger Beatdown but I hope that eventually your talents will reach a wider audience – because you write better than anyone I know and you deserve it.

Saturday, August 7, 2010 at 12:11 am | [Permalink](#)

11 Trackbacks/Pingbacks

1. [Women, self-promotion and social rituals « Fatadelic](#) on Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 1:43 am

[...] Published Thursday, 28 January 2010 Fatadelic Leave a Comment
Sady at Tiger Beatdown has an interesting discussion about how female self-promotion (or lack of it) and the social [...]

2. [Tweets that mention Tiger Beatdown > Girl Culture and the Race to the Bottom: About that Rant About Women -- Topsy.com](#) on Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 4:37 pm

[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by Jenna McWilliams, Jenna McWilliams, Jesspgh, Deirdra Kiai, Katherine Farmar and others.
Katherine Farmar said: Sady Doyle on self-deprecating women:
<http://tigerbeatdown.com/?p=731> BRILLIANT. [...]

3. [uberVU - social comments](#) on Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 8:02 pm

Social comments and analytics for this post...

This post was mentioned on Twitter by deirdrakiai: Girl Culture and the Race to the Bottom (another fantastic, spot-on post from Tiger Beatdown) <http://bit.ly/c8kACn..>

4. [Umm... yeah... « Girlish Whimsy](#) on Saturday, January 30, 2010 at 3:58 pm

[...] I just read this post on Tiger Beatdown, which explained my entire life to me... you know, in that way in which [...]

5. [Interesting posts, weekend of 1/30/10 « Feminists with Female Sexual Dysfunction](#) on Saturday, January 30, 2010 at 4:09 pm

[...] Girl Culture and the Race to the Bottom: About that Rant About

Women – This is a long post about the dynamics of girls' friendships & mean girls style frenemies. [...]

6. [Tweets that mention Tiger Beatdown > Girl Culture and the Race to the Bottom: About that Rant About Women -- Topsy.com](#) on Sunday, January 31, 2010 at 9:45 am

[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by Moira Jones and Meg Clark, Amazon Syren. Amazon Syren said: So this just blew my mind. "Girl Culture and the Race to the Bottom": <http://tigerbeatdown.com/?p=731#more-731> #feminism [...]

7. [the right to take up space « saepe](#) on Sunday, January 31, 2010 at 1:32 pm

[...] since Sady Doyle posted her amazing response to Clay Shirky over at Tiger Beatdown, "Girl Culture and The Race to the Bottom: About That Rant About Women." After having ideas of this sort jangling in my head for months, it was refreshing to see [...]

8. [It is a truth universally acknowledged « A Bitch Disapproves](#) on Saturday, February 6, 2010 at 3:24 pm

[...] So here are some thinky thoughts I have been having about friendships between women. [...]

9. [Abby Fitch » Blog Archive » Mars vs. Venus](#) on Wednesday, February 17, 2010 at 8:35 am

[...] GIRLS An Original Reply [...]

10. [links for 2010-03-06 « Embololalia](#) on Saturday, March 6, 2010 at 1:06 pm

[...] Tiger Beatdown > Girl Culture and the Race to the Bottom: About that Rant About Women Lots of people have written about the Fat Talk already. For years, I thought this was some grody stereotype that you only found in male stand-up comedians' routines about how women are awful. But then I met women who actually did it: the thing where, before ordering dinner at a restaurant, you all talk about how you should order this and you absolutely cannot order that, because you are so disgusting and you cannot stick to your diet and eating a cheeseburger will literally send you right straight to hell, and if you are the girl who straight-up says she wants some nachos so covered in cheese and guacamole and various meats that they might as well not even have any chips involved – just a big mess of meats and milk fat and squished-up avocados, that is the experience for which you are aiming, and also it would help if the entire thing had sour cream all over it – well, you just might have earned yourself a Complinsult about how brave you are with your dietary habits, young lady. (tags: bodypolitics:fat gender culture women food adolescence) [...]

11. [things and bits » Closing tabs](#) on Monday, March 8, 2010 at 8:06 pm

[...] Girl Culture and the Race to the Bottom This. [...]