



When it comes to surviving office politics, there's no need to feel like Ugly Betty, as **CATHERINE JARVIE** explains.

We've all been there. First day on a new job and you slink into a shiny new office where there's a place for everyone and everyone has a place.

Everyone, that is, except you, the square-peg-in-the-round-hole new girl who's so eager to please you could scrape the scent off you and sell it in a bottle marked "Desperation".

It is, frankly, excruciating. And so horribly, universally familiar that the opening episodes of the Channel 7 hit *Ugly Betty* – in which a talented yet geeky outsider lands a career-making job on a ruthlessly bitchy fashion magazine – has had us all squirming.

What might prove to be a little harder to recognise is what happens next.

Betty the misfit walks unguided into the Dragon's Den and, instead of getting eaten alive, manages to tame the dragons. She does this, quite simply, through that hoary old cliché much loved by fairytales and the makers

of prime-time TV shows: by being nice.

REALITY BITES

Now that's all very well in the land of cliché-laden, feel-good comedy but what about out here in the real world?

Those who want to get ahead learn quickly that what's needed even more than the requisite thick skin is a willingness to adopt and believe the mantra "Trust No One" – with bizarre and sometimes frankly laughable results.

Take the woman I heard about recently who, while trialling for a new job, phoned her sister from the office cupboard – she was trying to find out how to tackle a tricky spreadsheet rather than let on to her colleagues that she was anything less than up to speed.

Sure, the office can be where some of your most lasting friendships are made. But it's no coincidence those friendships tend to be stronger the more awful the job is and/or the lower the likelihood of

promotion. (There is, after all, solidarity to be had in shared misery.)

Lay down a little (un)friendly competition and all bets are off. A spot of backstabbing here, the mild appropriation of someone else's effort or ideas there, and before you know it you've sold your soul for the opportunity to move two or three points up the pay scale.

Which is where *Ugly Betty* serves a useful function – not so much for the leading lady herself but for the lessons to be learned from those around her. If you take away the botox-ridged glamour, the ambitious, dead-eyed wannabes of *Mode* magazine are familiar to us all.

Consider watching bitchy Wilhelmina and her ilk as the perfect study in getting to know your enemy and learning how to avoid them.

I WILL SURVIVE

Nice girls struggle with office politics not because they're doormats but because they expect everyone else



to be as nice as them. Once you get your head around the brutal reality of office life and learn how to dodge your colleagues' venom-tipped bullets, the rest is easy.

Simply grit your teeth, work hard and trust that your time will come.

Nice girls might finish a little later than their more ruthless peers, but the smart ones understand the value of patience and get to have the last laugh.

■ SOURCE: www.handbag.com

HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?

DR BELLA



“Besides lying back and thinking of England, there are only two words to describe what women do during sex.”

Last week I wrote about the words people use when they talk about sex. Men had zillions of words to choose from, most way too naughty to publish. But how do women talk about sex and, their role in it?

Well, first there is a little question to contend with: what is sex?

Traditionally sex is defined as a heterosexual act involving penetration. But, in this day and age, consensus about its meaning is harder to come by. Social scientists are asking, how does non-penetrative, homosexual or cyber sex fit into this definition? And why does penetration distinguish “real” sex from mere foreplay? Under this dictum, if a woman orgasms, foreplay has worked, but sex by definition is far from over.

Remember the Bill Clinton sex scandal? The former US president swore that he and Monica Lewinsky had not had “sexual relations.” In light of this, Time and CNN conducted a poll. They asked Americans: “If Clinton and Lewinsky did the following, should it be considered sex?” That’s a “yes” for 87 per cent and a “no” for 7 per cent.

Touched in each other in the genital region directly or indirectly through clothing? For 69 per cent it was “yes” and for 25 per cent “no”. And – get this – 40 per cent of people said that if Clinton and Lewinsky kissed in a romantic way, it should be considered sex. Far out.

Now, let’s turn to the way women talk about sex. In my collection of 500-plus words for an academic paper on sex, although there were many shared

words that both men and women can use, hardly any existed solely for women’s usage. There is a scattering of words related to female infidelity and a few to describe lesbian sex. But my research shows that besides lying back and thinking of England, there are only two words to describe what women do during sex. Think equestrian (ie. ride, straddle.)

When it comes to what men do to women during sex though, often in relation to conquest, there are tonnes of terms. Think: He me. (Fill in the blank with a verb). And, there are even more terms in relation to violent conquest: gang rape, sexually abused, taken advantage of, without consent, forcible entry...

What does this tell us about society?

Well, sex seems to be about what men do, verifying linguists’ theories about the “active penis” versus the “passive vagina.”

Just where is women’s sexual vocabulary? This was a serious question for feminists in the 1970s. During this time Susan Brownmiller wrote: “The sex act has its *modus operandi* in something men call penetration. The feminist Barbara Myerhoff has suggested that if women were in charge of sex and language, the same act could be called enclosure – a revolutionary concept.”

Right, girls, 30 years has lapsed since then and we still don’t have new, female-only terms to describe our role in sex. So, let’s create some. What about words like ... engulfed, caved, coved, or tunneled? If you can think of some cooler ones, please send them in.

BTW

Questions, thoughts, sexual tips?
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