

Backstabbing, bitchiness, boyfriend stealing - and that's just your friends. In this extract from her

SISTERS ARE DOING IT



Deborra-Lee
Furness, with
husband Hugh
Jackman.

IT'S ALL ABOUT ME. HAVE YOU NOTICED ME YET? I'M THE GIRL AT the dinner party who has a better, funnier, more outrageous story than you. I'm the girl with the cleavage plumped up high, the girl with CDD (compulsive disclosure disorder). Give me five minutes and I'll give you my life.

My peripheral vision excels that of a hawk. I'll notice what make of shoes you're wearing, the cut of your hair, stray cellulite, your wandering eye. If you're tall, I'll feel short; if you're thin, I'll feel fat; if you're fat, I'll feel thin. If I like your hair, I'll imitate it at my next outing; if I like your bag, I'll spend my lunch hour scouring the stores; if I like your man, then watch out.

Of course, you'll think I'm charming, though perhaps "a little loud". You'll laugh at my jokes, be outraged by my stories and envy my daring outlook on life. Inwardly you'll be finding faults: my laugh may irritate, my manners may be self-obsessed, my bra strap may be showing.

At the end of the eve, we'll air kiss and promise to meet for lunch.

You'll go home and smoke a packet of cigarettes or finish a bottle of wine and I'll go home and inhale a half-eaten packet of chocolate biscuits in an attempt to quell the unease. Our guilt at feeling lowly will motivate us to overcompensate with the promised lunch. We'll share our most intimate secrets and find a common bond in our loathing of our thighs. Our phones will always be available to take the other's call in times of crisis and celebration. This may go on for years; it may go on for weeks.

One day, one of us will do something unforgivable in the other's eyes (it could be something as minor as forgetting to return a call) and we'll never hear from the other person again. We'll be left wondering what we've done.

Women have yet to realise they can have conflict with each other without losing their friendship

How can a friendship so intense disintegrate into nothing overnight?

Second-wave feminists would have us believe that all women were created equal. Little room was available for difference of opinion in their day and women spoke in one voice only. Competition between women was swept under the carpet and not discussed, like the previously forbidden topics of menstruation or masturbation.

Women are reticent to talk of their competitive feelings for fear of appearing aggressive, ambitious or self-centred, as if the three were mutually exclusive. It's the way in which competition manifests between women that can cause the destruction of female relationships. Women have yet to realise that they can have conflict with each other without losing their friendship and they have yet to discover how to do that successfully without guilt, without silence and without gossiping behind each other's backs. Women who swear this competition does not exist because it is unladylike or unsisterly or too confronting are giving women, as a whole, the silent treatment. Without discussion young girls will continue to compare and despair, hating their bodies, starving themselves, cutting themselves, earning less, hating more.

The code of silence around female competition needs to be lifted and to do so women need to explore what it is we are competing for. Envy needs to be transformed into empathy ... competition needs to be seen as a human quality, not just a masculine one of which to be proud only if you are born with testosterone flowing through your veins. Competition plus oestrogen need not equal cold-hearted bitch. □

This is an edited extract from *Anything She Can Do I Can Do Better: The Truth About Female Competition* by Rachael Oakes-Ash, published by Random House Australia, \$22.95.

book, **Rachael Oakes-Ash** exposes the last taboos of female friendship

TO THEMSELVES

TALES FROM THE TRENCHES Famous women count their "frenemies"

◀ **Deborra-Lee Furness, actor**

"There is a certain type of woman that has a very strong need to be appreciated by the opposite sex. You can spot her if you are maybe out to lunch with the ladies ... enter the male... Before your very eyes a sex goddess arises, her sexuality button is turned on, her body language changes. There will be no more chatting about shopping. The gal pals are now invisible, viewed only as the enemy to overthrow in pursuit of the male's rapt attention."



▶ **Fiona Horne, author, musician and white witch**

"I was in an awful group at school and I would never know when they would decide to 'ignore' me. I remember getting off the bus once and walking up to my group with a smile on my face and saying hello and they all turned their backs on me and ignored me and a group of guys sitting nearby laughed at me. I was called fish lips because of my full lips. I was pushed down the stairs at school by the year 10 girls because one of their boyfriends said I was cute. There was no rhyme or reason."



▲ **Jessica Adams, astrologer and author**

"You can spot toxic females a mile off. In fact, I sniff the air now and just leave the room. The pattern is always the same. Their mothers competed with them, or their sisters did. They didn't get any encouragement or support unless they were doing well... A friend of mine calls it 'fanging'. Beware the fangs, sisters! The writer Jessica Mitford had another word for these mixed-up females - 'frenemies'. Crosses between friends and enemies. One minute they are doing you mad favours and lavishing you with compliments, and the next, the python strikes."

▲ **Natasha Stott Despoja, senator**

"People align themselves with the powerful in order to survive, which means women are not always the strongest supporters of other women."



▲ **Anna Johnson, author**

"Socially, I think competition between women is keenest in their 20s. It is a sad irony that when women are at their most youthfully beautiful they are also at their most pitiless with each other... I remember a lot of women clearly hating me in their 20s. I am wiser now. I know how to attend a dinner party as the only single woman present and befriend the hostess."

▼ **Sandra Yates, chairwoman, Saatchi & Saatchi Australia**

"You can make just as much of a case for bloodthirsty women as you can for blokes. I don't want to put on the pressure of having to be life's eternal goody-two-shoes. It's not our job to be everybody else's barometer for behaving well. Some women are ferociously competitive, some women are aggressive, some women love to fight, many women don't. But some men are like that, too."

