



ELLE'S ACTING EDITOR-IN-CHIEF LOTTE JEFFS TAKES **A SIDWAYS LOOK** AT A WORD **THE FASHION WORLD** CAN'T STOP SAYING AND ASKS: 'WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?'

## LEXICON

# SNOWFLAKE

*Pejorative: a 'hypersensitive' young person*

What do you call a mass of snowflakes? When Team ELLE joined protestors for the Women's March on London, there was no denying that Generation Snowflake – young people who are 'overly sensitive and incapable of dealing with opinions that differ from their own' – were causing a storm. On 21 January, they took their pathetic, wet, quick-to-disintegrate and painfully unique selves to the streets to whinge about silly little issues such as, um, equality and human rights – and so did an estimated four million people worldwide\*. My colleagues wielded placards that read 'When they go low, we go high', 'The future is female' and, my own slogan, 'Let's get intersectional', a post-feminist riff on Olivia Newton-John's *Let's Get Physical*, which I should have realised wasn't funny as soon as I said the words 'post-feminist riff'. Whatever! I've never felt more a part of something than I did that day.

One of the criticisms levelled at Generation Snowflake is their inability to cope when people disagree with their liberal opinions. One writer for the *Daily Mail* ranted about their 'almost belligerent sense of entitlement'. She claimed: 'Express a view they disagree with and you must immediately recant and apologise... Generation Snowflake believe it's their right to be protected from anything they might find unpalatable.' But what I took away from the march was that this 'generation' was facing

up to every disagreeable view expressed towards them (sexism, racism, homophobia) with logic, strength and some very witty placards. Emotionally unstable – or flakey – they were not.

Women are tough. Years of having to fight for equal pay and equal rights will do that to you. When students say they don't want someone with hateful views to speak at their university, it doesn't mean they can't cope with them – they cope with people's prejudices every day. They just don't want to



**'WOMEN ARE TOUGH. YEARS OF HAVING TO FIGHT FOR EQUAL PAY AND EQUAL RIGHTS WILL DO THAT TO YOU'**

be subjected to those people where they work, live or study.

I'd argue that this generation, dismissed as needy and too easily offended, have skin thicker than a Louis Vuitton leather jacket. I'm not surprised to learn there's a new management style hitting offices from Silicon Valley to Slough called 'radical candour', which is all about being blunt with your co-workers. And guess what? It was devised by a woman. As a director at Google, Kim Scott delivered what she thought was a great presentation in front of her then-boss, Sheryl

Sandberg, only to be told she said 'um' too much. In fact, Sandberg's exact words were: 'You know, Kim, I can tell I'm not really getting through to you. When you say "um" every third word, it makes you sound stupid.' It's enough to turn a snowflake into a slush puppie.

There's a happy middle ground between being unbearably fragile and being so thick-skinned you just become a bit unpleasant, and the fashion industry occupies this sweet spot exactly. On the one hand, you'll never meet a more radically candid bunch: to get a collection out on time or style a celebrity, you need iron will. Equally, working with fashion types can feel like you're doing business in Japanese, a culture that can't and won't say 'no', but expects you to pick up on the subtle cues in body language and intonation to interpret what is meant; if fashion editors and designers started saying exactly what they thought, it'd only be a matter of time before the whole industry imploded. But you know what? It works.

The problem with Scott's 'not mean, but clear' radical candour isn't that we'd all be blubbing wrecks if our boss gave us criticism. It's that it potentially gives bullies licence to be cruel. And if admitting I prefer the creative industry's tough-yet-sensitive approach makes me a snowflake, then so be it. Because the thing about snowflakes is they amount to something powerful. Together, they are an avalanche.

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