



<sup>1</sup> Swapping my flats for a pair of heels, I hop out of my chauffeured BMW. I'm at a barristers' office in Birmingham where I'm due to <sup>5</sup> give a presentation about female empowerment to a room filled with legal professionals. As the CEO of Minority Report Consulting, a female empowerment consulting <sup>10</sup> company, I've been booked for the evening.

Except when I enter the building and make my way towards the conference room, there is no
15 audience. Instead, there is a grey-haired photographer who sits on one of the empty plastic chairs. I step up to the lectern. He looks at me, \_\_1\_\_. 'Are you, erm... ready
20 then?' he asks, placing his camera lens towards me. I smooth down my skirt, take a deep breath, and begin...

## The next #girlboss

25 Here's the thing: I'm not a founder of a consultancy business, and is my father's office. The BMW I stepped out of was an Uber and 30 the photographer is my dad. I'm a 27-year-old freelance writer who still lives with her parents in Rugby.

I work really hard and I'm doing OK. In fact, I often think I'm making 35 2 — until I open Instagram and see the legion of young women I follow being true #girlbosses about town. There's the woman who has made a '30 Under 30' list. 40 And there's my friend whose feed

I'm not here to give a talk. This

40 And there's my friend whose feed features all the launches brands have invited her to as a rep for a major media company. I have to admit: their shimmering public
45 profiles have, on occasion, left me

feeling 3. But the closer I look at some of these Instagram accounts, the more I begin to notice something odd.

There's a vagueness to where they appear to be speaking and a lack of specificity to the talks they claim to be giving (there are, for example, no details of how to book tickets).

55 We never see the audience. And they speak of 'staff' who are never seen and never given more than a first name. The devil, it seemed, is in the *lack* of detail.

Which made me wonder... could it all be an elaborate trick?

I decided to take the \_4\_\_. I was going to be the next #girlboss! Or at least that's what I was going to 65 make it look like. After all, you have to fake it till you make it, right? So I opened Instagram and fired up a new account for my freshly imagined company: Minority Report 70 Consulting.

We're an empowerment consulting agency providing cultural futurecasting and we also help to foster business innovation through speculative fiction. Confusing, right? That's by design. People don't like \_\_5\_\_, so I'm hoping that by dazing them with a jumbled description I can avoid questions about what exactly my 'company' does. As for my following of over 2,000? Easy. I bought them through a website called Buzzoid, which

offers 2,500 followers for the

sprice of a takeaway. As for anyone thinking that even your cat can spot a fake Instagram presence, you just haven't met the right robots.

What smart people do is buy

a package that automatically delivers likes to every photo you post. Which is 6.

## Staging and spinning

One of the first things I post is an 95 image of The Lanesborough hotel, one of the most expensive hotels in London. 'There are many wonderful hotels in London, but The Lanesborough has got to be our 100 favourite for conducting business,' I write beneath the image. An image, by the way, that I took by walking in, taking a picture, and then hotfooting it out of there.

A slew of comments follow, mostly emojis that I respond to with further emojis - which appear to be the main method of communication for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. The 110 hotel drop-by is pretty easy, so I repeat it, going into Claridge's and posting that the Minority Report Consulting 'team' is there for company drinks. Suddenly I strike 115 oil. An entrepreneur from Detroit, Michigan, who runs six businesses, comments with the 'prayer' emoji. (Whether that person has also employed bots to do their dirty 120 work is another matter.)

I post a picture of a pair of
Louboutin shoes, saying I \_\_8\_
them. 'Never fails to make our day
when a client expresses gratitude

125 for a job well done in this manner!'
I type. I get a message from an
account called Femalebossclub.
'Love your content!' it says. I'm
starting to feel like a real #girlboss

130 now. I link the Minority Report
Consulting account to my real
Instagram profile, and friends start
to reach out to say how \_\_\_9\_\_ they

of influence by putting a 'spin' on things I'm already doing. I'm passionate about the work the Mental Health Foundation does, 140 and when it's my birthday, I ask friends to donate to them. Would it be so wrong to say I was now

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an 'ambassador' for them? I have technically organised a 'fundraiser' 145 for the cause. I post it. I get several comments.

## Opting out

This is all starting to make me feel 10 - I'm pretending to

150 be something I'm not, and every comment I get, fake or otherwise, reminds me of that. Pushing these uncomfortable feelings to the back of my mind, I move on. Besides,

155 my 'co-workers' (read: me) have been busy, especially my assistant 'Camilla' (me again but with a

160 Mostly people are polite, telling 'Camilla' to get me to fill in speaker application forms online, which I

event managers on my behalf.

higher voice), who has been calling

try. I also discover #callforspeakers on Twitter and fire off responses 165 to anyone filling spots for anything even remotely relevant.

What would happen if I did? Would I get trapped in a career based on lies, until it all came tumbling down?

180 While it's tempting to accept the invitation, I turn it down. I believe that winning based on anything other than your own merit is meaningless. People cut corners 185 because achieving legitimate success takes time and effort. But even if they get somewhere, their 'rewards' will always 12.

There was one upside, however:

190 if it's so easy to propel yourself to
the next level with a bit of staged
success, then it's equally easy to do
the same with something you've
legitimately achieved. I need to put

195 myself forward for opportunities
that I think I'd be good at. Going
forward, I'll be upping my hustle –
but promoting what's real. <<



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