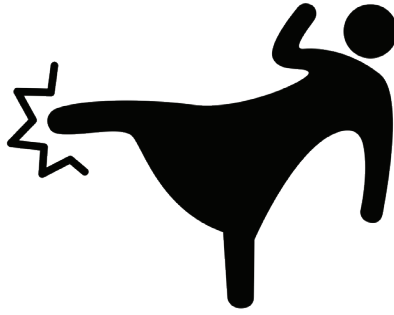


Chapter 4



FIERCE FEMININITY



What's the Non-Obvious Trend?

As our definitions for gender become more fluid, fiercely independent women are increasingly celebrated as heroines, seen as role models and shifting the role of women in modern society.

It is an underappreciated irony of history that modern American women may have the British to thank for their current independence.

In the early 1900s American suffragette Alice Paul visited England and met Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of a group that believed in a more “militant” approach to demanding women’s right to vote which involved heckling, window smashing, rock throwing and arson to raise public awareness.

Upon her return to the US, Paul argued that “the militant policy is bringing success. . . the women of England are talking of the time when they will vote, instead of the time when their children would vote.”

In 1914, Paul founded her own suffrage organization called the National Woman’s Party (NWP) to put these tactics into action.

Over the course of the next several years, her radical tactics got her arrested and imprisoned, where she organized a hunger strike, was forcibly fed, put into solitary confinement and finally created enough sympathy among the public that President Woodrow Wilson eventually ordered her release.

Her lifelong crusade on behalf of women's rights is widely credited with eventually helping women win the right to vote in 1920. What Paul showed the world nearly 100 years ago was that sometimes soft arguments must give way to harsher demands and an unexpected dose of fierceness.

Nearly 100 years later – a new *Fierce Femininity* is taking shape where women are becoming stronger, more independent and capturing power and attention around the world in ways that would have seemed impossible just a decade ago.

Three years ago I featured a trend I called *Powered By Women* aimed at describing the growing role and influence of female leaders in business. Today that trend has evolved more broadly and with a new urgency as women are emerging as heroes who save the day (and the guy) in modern fairy tale stories, and continuing their rise as dominant leaders in business and politics.

Altogether they are reimagining the role of women in modern society – with a strength and fierceness that is surprising.

The Heroine's Story

Around the same time that I was first writing my 2014 Report, an augmented reality digital comic series titled Priya's Shakti was introduced at the Mumbai Comic and Film Convention with an unexpected storyline. It was an immediate viral success despite the taboo backstory of a village girl named Priya who was the survivor of a gang rape and was on a mission to stop violence against women.

The graphic novel was downloaded more than 500,000 times and generated more than 400 stories in the global media. It also brought much needed awareness of sexual violence to a younger generation of Indians.

Priya offers a bold model for a diverse, fierce and strong comic book heroine, but she is only one of many such heroines to emerge from the

comics over the past several years.

La Borinquena is a Puerto Rican superheroine who discovers on a family trip to her parent's homeland that she has special powers.

The latest incarnation of long running character "Ms. Marvel" is a 16 year old high school student and Muslim-American girl from New Jersey named Kamala Khan.

Marvel announced that the new "Iron Man" in the comic series will be a 15 year old African American science prodigy and early MIT student named Riri Williams.

This steady shift in comic books to the strong female action hero mirrors a trend in Hollywood. Blockbuster dystopian teen book series like *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* each feature strong leading women.

The new *Star Wars* film is anchored by a strong female lead character and the Nickelodeon program *Bella and the Bulldogs* features a middle school story where Bella is quarter-back of the football team.

As Jill Soloway, Emmy-winning co-founder of curated online video network Wify.tv said in a recent interview, "every time I create a show or movie where a woman is a protagonist, we are shifting the way it feels for women to be the center of their stories."

Play #LikeAGirl

The Cannes Lions award winning campaign from P&G brand Always was launched with the hashtag #likeagirl and sought to reclaim the phrase "like a girl" from being an insult to an empowering idea. The campaign featured a series of videos where girls are challenged to do things like run or throw a ball or fight "like a girl" and brilliantly forced consumers to reevaluate what it means to do anything like a girl.

Global advertising from some of the biggest brands in the world is also making this shift. For example, Under Armour's viral ad featuring African American ballet dancer Misty Copeland and her powerful training regimen has been viewed online more than 10 million times.

Nike has ads in the US featuring the women's soccer team and Nike India recently celebrated fierce, female athleticism in India with its own 2+ minute ad.

This same advertising technique of featuring fierce women is being used by MAC makeup in print ads with Serbian-American competitive body builder and fitness model Jelena Abbou flexing her muscular arms while wearing an evening gown.

Brawny® brand paper towels, a product that has long relied on the masculine image of a lumberjack in a plaid shirt as its icon celebrated Women's History Month this past March 2016, with a new #Strength-HasNoGender campaign that featured the images of four notable women dressed in plaid shirts and looking like suitably fierce female lumberjacks themselves.

As the advertising industry starts to bring in and foster more senior female talent (a growing priority within the industry), this trend toward seeing more powerfully depicted women in marketing and advertising is likely to continue.

Spinster Power

There is an interesting demographic and cultural side to this trend as well when you consider the growing generation of women who are rejecting the traditional choices of marriage and childrearing for an independent life. In just the past two years, several best-selling books have focused on this shift:

- *All The Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation* (2016) by Rebecca Traister, writer at large for New York magazine and contributing editor at Elle
- *Spinster: Making A Life Of One's Own* (2015) by Kate Bolick, contributing editor at The Atlantic
- *Otherhood: Modern Women Finding A New Kind Of Happiness* (2015) by Melanie Notkin, a startup founder and entrepreneur

When author Kate Bolick was asked about her intentional use of the harsh term "Spinster" to describe these single unmarried women, she said that the word itself "broadcasts our confusion and ambivalence around

the single woman.”

Journalist Rebecca Traister explored another angle with her acclaimed book *All the Single Ladies* based on more than seven years of research. Traister was inspired by the startling growth of women who were building their adult lives outside the institution of marriage for the first time in recorded history. In just the past generation alone, the median age for first marriages for women went from 22 to 27 – a dramatic shift in a relatively short period of time.

Rather than positioning this as just an indictment of marriage, Traister concluded that these years were creating a new mentality among American women about *whether* they may eventually choose to marry or not. This new generation of women, according to both Traister and Bolick, were perfectly equipped to make the decision for themselves because they are independent minded, better equipped to take care of themselves and less reliant on a male partner for income or security.

These are the new “spinsters” and they count among their ranks some of the most influential women in media and business – from Oprah Winfrey to entrepreneur and former model Tyra Banks. Each has discovered a path to what author Melanie Notkin calls “Otherhood,” describing women who either by choice or “circumstantial infertility” don’t become mothers – but still find joy and fulfillment in living their lives and being themselves.

Girl Power in Music

For American recording artist Beyoncé, singing about the power of women is certainly not a new theme. Her single first released in 2008 called “Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)” has been played as an anthem for women demanding commitment from (mostly) men in films and television for the past decade. In 2011 when she released a new single titled “Run The World (Girls),” it was welcomed by many critics as a more direct and assertive approach to female empowerment.

In 2016, she unexpectedly released her new album *Lemonade* directly – throwing the music industry into a tailspin of introspection. The album itself is an example of *Fierce Femininity* expressed in a way that only “Queen Bey” (as her fans call her) could deliver.

In the album and companion film, Beyoncé tells the story of her husband cheating on her, going through a range of emotions (intuition, denial, anger, apathy, emptiness, accountability, reformation, forgiveness, resurrection, hope, redemption) and coming through the other side. The album is authentic, unfiltered and powerful – but it is not the only example of the *Fierce Femininity* trend coming to life through music.

Playlists of “girl power” songs are commonly created and shared – with tracks like “Can’t Hold Us Down (Christina Aguilera), “Bad Girls” (M.I.A.), “Brave” (Sara Bareilles), “Fight Song” (Rachel Platten) and dozens of others.

Outside of pop music, another example of this type of Fierce Femininity is Vancouver-based artist Jasleen Powar merges her background in slam poetry with an authentic style that includes sampling 90s hits and commonly referencing her Sikh-South Asian heritage. One single from her latest EP titled *Bollywoes* called “Queen” starts with asking the question “what good is a king without a queen?”

It’s the perfect question to bring this trend to life.

Investing In Girls

Professor Rafia Ghubash wants to correct some of the misperceptions about women in the Middle East.

As founder of the Dubai Women’s Museum, she appears frequently at global conferences and in media interviews speaking optimistically about the role of women in Dubai, and more broadly in the Middle East. “The media do not promote the achievements of women,” she said in one recent interview. “Come to Dubai and UAE and it is wholly apparent that women have equal opportunities and are considered to be equal to men.”

Perhaps the most visible promoter of this point of view from the region is the popular Jordanian Queen Rania – who has long been an advocate of women’s rights. She is an international icon and has tirelessly used technology to dispel Western myths about the Middle East. Videos from her YouTube channel have been viewed over 14 million times, and she is followed by more than 5 million people on Twitter.

After being named Glamour’s Woman of the Year, she told the

magazine, “Look at any country that’s plagued with poverty, disease or violence; The antidote is girls. Girls are the antibodies to many of society’s ills.” In the time since, that message has been brought to life by many other global initiatives – including a popular grassroots movement fueled by the *Girl Rising* documentary film.

First released in 2014, the *Girl Rising* film from Academy Award-nominated director Richard E. Robbins follows the global stories of nine ordinary girls who confront impossible challenges to pursue their dreams. Since its launch the film has sparked a global conversation about the importance of educating girls that now incorporates public screenings, full teaching curriculums, extended global editions for various regions and community gatherings around the world.

Most importantly, along with physical places like the Dubai Women’s Museum and the celebrity power of Queen Rania, the film is a symbol of hope and change for women and girls around the world to see themselves as more liberated, powerful and empowered than ever before.

Why It Matters:

For years the ideal woman was usually described as someone who could “have it all,” be a wife and mom and boss and balance the perfect life of work, home and everything in between. Women were celebrated for being the jugglers in chief of the household and an impossible ideal was created.

Now that façade is breaking and taking its place is a far stronger, more human and more identifiable portrait of womanhood. Women can be fierce, strong, unapologetic. The lines are blurring and standing in the middle is a new generation of women who have control to make the lives they want.

This means more women are choosing to remain single for longer, more women around the world are getting educated and starting companies, more investors are backing women – and perhaps most importantly that more girls around the world are seeing these non-obvious examples and being encouraged to dream about the future for themselves.

How To Use This Trend:

- ✓ **Empower female mentors** - Mars Chocolate North America President Tracey Massey spends as much of her time mentoring as she can - and speaks often about its value. Having senior women leaders mentor younger ones is a necessity if the new generation is going to succeed with more confidence and be given more opportunities. And if you happen to be a female leader, consider taking more of your time to be a mentor.
- ✓ **Think like a woman** - Rather than simply equating men and women as equal, there are a range of books like *The Athena Doctrine*, *Lean In* and most recently, *Feminist Fight Club* which all offer useful insights on how to balance life and work, succeed in your career and do it with unique femininity. Most interestingly, each of these books is equally valid and insightful even if you happen to be male.