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[FEMALE]: A COLLECTION OF PROFILES FEATURING INFLUENTIAL,
INSPIRING, MODERN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO HAVE MADE HISTORY

by
Tara Lyn Hawkins

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi as partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2019

Approved by

Advisor: Professor Samir A. Husni

Reader: Professor Scott Fiene

Reader: Professor Charles D. Mitchell

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DEDICATION

For the brave women who paved the way for those who follow in their footsteps. And, for the women who have yet to change the world. May you always remember through the challenges you may face, you are in good company.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to take this opportunity to thank my advisor Dr. Husni. He brings joy and passion to his teaching and has a heart for helping students succeed. I am blessed to have been able to benefit from his guidance and wisdom.

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Finally, I owe much gratitude and appreciation to my family and friends for always supporting me and encouraging me to pursue creativity.

ABSTRACT

TARA LYN HAWKINS: *[FEMALE]*: A collection of profiles featuring influential and inspiring, modern American women who have made history.
(Under the direction of Dr. Samir A. Husni)

[FEMALE] is a collection of profiles that feature the stories of some of the most influential and inspiring modern American women and how they have influenced the world. The profiles look into the lives and careers of female athletes, entrepreneurs, political figures and entertainers who are currently alive in 2019. Each profile includes dialogue from recorded interviews with the featured women.

The idea for this project came from wanting to learn more about the successful, influential role models in my life. To learn about the hardships and odds they overcame in order to achieve their dreams and become the women they are today. I chose a diverse range of women to feature in hopes that anyone that reads this collection would be able to identify a woman they can emulate. I believe in women and I hope these profiles serve as a reminder that women are capable of changing the world, one story at a time.

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“Beauty Beyond Size”

Ashley Graham

Omaha, Nebraska

"Be your own woman. Be your own kind of role model. And remember that the women around you are women you can lift up. You can change their lives."

She is a model, a cover girl, a fashion designer, an author, and a body activist. Ashley Graham has changed what it looks like to be a successful model in the 21st Century.

Only 12 years old when she was discovered at a mall in her hometown of Omaha, Nebraska, Graham began her modeling career. At 13, she signed to a major modeling agency and began booking her first jobs. While she had some initial success, she was still known as the “fat model” in her hometown. “As a young model, my confidence was tugged at and pulled in all different directions. I struggled to achieve true confidence. I would go home and look in front of a mirror and hate what I saw.”

Despite the bullying, after high school Graham moved to New York to pursue modeling full time. “[My mom] taught me that beauty comes from within and that validation and self-worth must also come from within. In my lowest moments of insecurity, I realized that I had to reclaim my body and its image as my own.”

Her first summer in New York, however, was unsuccessful. “I always hated answering the question, ‘What do you do for a living?’ I would see that person’s eyebrow raise, as I would reply, ‘I’m a model.’ I’d have to quickly qualify with, ‘Well, I’m a plus size model.’ People in the fashion industry told me I would never be in magazines, let alone on the covers of them.”

After a difficult few months, Graham began utilizing social media as a way to directly connect with women without the need for casting directors or agents. She posted selfies and photos from behind the scenes at photo shoots using the hashtag #BeautyBeyondSize. Her fan base grew quickly and she now has more than 8.3 million followers on Instagram. “I felt free once I realized I was never going to fit the narrow mold society wanted me to fit in. I was never going to be perfect enough for an industry that defines perfection from the outside in.”

Graham has since appeared on the cover of *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Glamour*, and *Elle*. She was the first size 16 model to be on the cover of the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue*. Graham is campaigning for curvy girls to be included in more runway shows and for the elimination of the term ‘plus size.’ “Curvy models are becoming more and more vocal about the isolating nature of the term ‘plus size.’ We are calling ourselves what we want to be called: women, with shapes that are our own.”

Graham has created size-inclusive clothing lines sold at stores such as Macy’s, Nordstrom, Dress Barn and Dillard’s. The lines consist of lingerie, swimsuits and dresses sizes 4-24. In 2017, Graham released her book, “A New Model: What Confidence, Beauty, and Power Really Look Like.” In the memoir, she shared her experiences as a model and as an advocate for body positivity.

In 2018, she launched her podcast, “Pretty Big Deal” where she discusses culture, beauty, business and self-worth with some of the world’s most influential people. “My goal is to give a voice to young women who struggle to find someone they can look up to, for girls who struggle to look in the mirror and say, ‘I love you.’ For women who feel uncomfortable expressing their confidence. For women who have relinquished their rights to someone else.”

“Breaking Into Broadcast”

Barbara Walters

Boston, Massachusetts

"Don't fight the little fight. Be the first one in. Be the last one out. Do your homework. Choose your battles. Don't whine, and don't be the one who complains about everything. Fight the big fight."

Barbara Walters is the first woman to co-anchor a television network broadcast. During her time as a journalist, she has conducted interviews with world leaders, musicians, athletes, and entertainers. But, as a female journalist in the 1950's and 1960's, she struggled to be taken seriously in the industry.

Her career began after graduating college in 1951. Her first job was working at the NBC network affiliate in New York City, WNBT-TV (now WNBC) doing publicity and writing press releases. Ten years later, Walters joined NBC's "The Today Show" as a writer and researcher. She moved quickly up the ladder to become the show's regular "Today Girl," where she reported on lighter news assignments and the weather.

She didn't feel like a leader on the frontier, because she says she didn't 'deliberately' pave the way. "When I look back at the kinds of things I wasn't allowed to do when I began as a writer, even on "The Today Show," I could write only the so-called

‘female’ pieces. The big breakthrough was when I could write for men. I remember when I was there with an anchorman named Frank McGee. He had to ask three hard-news questions before I could ask one.” Walters became the program’s first female co-host after McGee’s death in 1974. “I also remember writing to the president of NBC News and saying, ‘We should do something on the women's movement,’ and he wrote back, ‘Not enough interest.’ Now I'm very encouraging and admiring of women.”

Walters and her husband adopted their first child, a daughter, in 1968. “I wanted my child so much. She was indeed the ‘chosen’ child. She was adopted after I'd had three miscarriages.” Walters and her husband later divorced in 1976. “I used to say that you could have a great marriage and a great career, a great marriage and great children, or great children and a great career, but you couldn't have all three. Now you can, with the support of a mate, if indeed you have one. It's a different time, and there are many women who do it.”

Becoming a mother led Walters to change television networks. “I'd decided to go to ABC, because it was time to see my child in the mornings without always being so exhausted.” While at ABC, Walters became the first female anchor of network evening news when she co-anchored with Harry Reasoner, earning an unprecedented \$1 million per year.

From 1979 until 2004, Walters was a co-host and producer for ABC’s 20/20 newsmagazine show. She covered presidential inaugurations, the 9/11 tragedies, several political debates and more. She interviewed notable public figures from Michael Jackson to Monica Lewinsky to Fidel Castro to Audrey Hepburn. “During an interview, I'm in control. It's in other aspects of my life where I'm not. And listen, when I say I'm not

nervous [for an interview], I want you to know that I'm hardly the most self-confident person. I second-guess almost everything I do, except editing. I love to edit.”

In 1997, she became a co-host of the daytime talk show, “The View.” Along with four other female hosts, the show brought together women of different generations, backgrounds, and views. The women discuss their perspectives on the day’s headlines and various hot topics. “I do want to mention the one thing that has changed others' perception of me: It's “The View.” People realized I could be silly and funny. I had to think about whether being on that show would interfere with my interviews with heads of state. Would I still be able to do hard news? I'd been around long enough that I had the reputation, so I could do both.” Although she retired from hosting after 16 seasons in 2014, Walters still remains the executive producer of “The View.”

Walters was inducted into the Television Academy Hall of Fame in 1989 and has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. She has won Daytime and Prime Time Emmy Awards, a Women in Film Lucy Award, a GLAAD Excellence in Media award and two Lifetime Achievement Awards. “I was the kind nobody thought could make it. I had a funny Boston accent. I couldn't pronounce my R's. I wasn't a beauty.”

Her final on-air interview before retirement was with presidential candidate Donald Trump for ABC News in December 2015. “I forget what I've done until I start working on a retrospective. Then I'm amazed. I was never supposed to be in front of the cameras. I wasn't beautiful. I didn't speak perfectly. At the time, the very few women on TV were weathergirls. Isn't it funny that we now have all these weathermen?”

“Unstoppable”

Bethany Hamilton

Kauai, Hawaii

"Courage doesn't mean you don't get afraid. Courage means you don't let fear stop you."

At the age of 13, Bethany Hamilton was a promising young surfer on her way to a professional surfing career. Her whole world changed while surfing with friends when a shark attacked her, taking her arm and seemingly, her dream of becoming a pro surfer. But, just one month after the attack, she returned to the water to surf again.

Hamilton grew up in Hawaii with her mom, dad and two older brothers. “I was probably on a surfboard before I could walk. And I know that my passion began very young and I am still incredibly passionate about surfing today. But growing up in Hawaii, it’s the perfect spot to take up surfing. Everyone in my family surfed, my parents taught my two older brothers and I how to surf. At a young age, they could see that I had a natural passion and talent for surfing. It was the start of something I knew I’d do forever.”

On October 31, 2003 Hamilton went for an early morning surf with her friend Alana Blanchard, Blanchard’s father and brother. Hamilton was lying on her surfboard waiting for a wave with her left arm dangling in the water, when a 14-foot tiger shark

attacked, taking a chunk out of the surfboard and severing her left arm, just below the shoulder. Hamilton described the bite as clean and initially painless, she noticed that the water had turned red before she even realized that her arm was missing. The Blanchard's paddled Hamilton back to shore and put her into an ambulance. By the time she arrived at the hospital, Hamilton had lost over 60% of her blood and was in hypovolemic shock. Hamilton's father, who was scheduled to have knee surgery that same morning, was already at the hospital, but she took his place in the operating room.

“At the time [the attack] initially happened I thought I had lost so much more than just my arm. I thought I had lost surfing and I didn't know what my future was going to hold. I didn't know what was possible, but thankfully, I had an amazing community of people there to support and encourage me. I had my faith in God. It reminded me that, ‘Hey, God has a future for your life. He has a plan for you and he is going to help you get through this.’ And he certainly did.”

With a custom-made board that was longer, slightly thicker and had a handle for her right arm, Hamilton began to learn to surf again. “Before I even got out of the hospital I was already planning to try surfing with one arm and waiting for the doctor to allow me back in the ocean after healing. The journey began less than a month later. I got back on my board and I remember my first time paddling out with one arm. It felt so awkward and weird. I kind of fell on my first wave. My third try I finally popped right up and rode the wave all the way to the beach and had tears of joy and excitement to be doing what I love to do again.” Hamilton continued to practice and in 2007, she began competing as a professional surfer, just four years after the attack.

Hamilton's story attracted a lot of attention. Her life was changed forever within a matter of seconds. "Learning how to deal with people and their reactions to my life is one of the most challenging things... people staring at me, people asking rude questions, dealing with media, stuff like that." Hamilton chose not to use a prosthetic arm and instead wanted to learn to live her life using only her right arm.

Since her recovery, Hamilton has done countless interviews, appeared on TV shows and been featured in magazines. The movie "Soul Surfer" was released in 2011. It told the story of her life and recovery after the attack. The movie was based on her book by the same name, released in 2004, just a year after the attack. Anna Sophia Robb played Hamilton in the film, but Hamilton performed all of her own surfing stunts.

In 2014, she released "Body and Soul," a book for young girls about health, wellness and faith. "I want to encourage young girls in their health and their overall journey through those teenage years which can be really tough. To think about what they eat, how they move their body in healthy ways, not just working out, but posture and finding things that they like to do to stay active. From there, encouraging them in their faith in God and their mental approach on a day-to-day basis. I meet a lot of young girls in everything that I do, and a lot of girls struggle with their body image. So, I wanted to encourage them to focus on being healthy, rather than getting caught up in struggles with the way they view themselves and where they place their identity."

Her nonprofit organization, Friends of Bethany is a Christian organization that hosts events, conferences and retreats. "One of my favorite events that we do is a retreat for amputee girls. We basically just hang out for the weekend in Southern California, take the girls surfing, encourage them through their struggles. All the girls have their own

different stories and different ways of how they have overcome. We talk about [things like] ‘How do you put your hair up with one arm?’ I love what I get to be a part of.”

Hamilton married Adam Dirks, a youth minister, in 2013 and in 2015 gave birth to their first child, Tobias. In 2018, they had their second baby boy, Wesley. Hamilton, now 29, continues to speak about her experiences and uses her platform to share her faith. “I enjoy public speaking, it’s a huge passion of mine now. I have such an awesome audience of young people and I love being able to influence them in good directions and to really think about their decisions.”

“Queen B”

Beyoncé Knowles Carter

Houston, Texas

"The most alluring thing a woman can have is confidence."

Since she was a little girl, Beyoncé Knowles Carter wanted to be a superstar.

Her stage presence and vocal talent were noticed at an early age while performing at local talent shows. Managed by her father, Carter took every chance she could get to perform. At the age of nine, Carter auditioned for a girl group, Girl's Tyme. She won a spot in the group and they began performing at local events. After seven years of performing and many name changes, the group was renamed Destiny's Child. Their performances attracted an offer to sign with Columbia Records and with the release of their first album in 1998, the group quickly rose to the top.

In 2000, the women of Destiny's Child decided to pursue solo careers. Carter began her professional acting career while working on her solo album, "Dangerously in Love." It was released in 2003 and featured collaborations with Jay-Z, Missy Elliott and Sean Paul. The album sold three million copies within the first six months and won five Grammys, including Best Contemporary R&B Album.

Following the success of her first album, Carter continued to release more singles and albums. In 2006, she starred alongside Jennifer Hudson, Jaime Foxx and Eddie Murphy in the movie “Dreamgirls.”

In 2008, Carter married Jay-Z and soon after, released another record-breaking album, “I am...Sasha Fierce.” She returned to the big screen that year to play R&B legend Etta James in “Cadillac Records.” The following January, Carter sang James' song, “At Last,” for President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama at his inaugural ball.

After her parents' divorce, Carter made the decision to drop her father as her manager and manage herself in 2011. “It's very difficult managing myself. Every night when I go to sleep I ask hundreds of questions, but I'm learning so much. I'm making mistakes and I'm learning from them. I'm not afraid to make a mistake, I embrace mistakes, they make you who you are. It was very risky for me to step out on my own. Being a young woman, I wanted to set the example that it's possible for us to own our own businesses and our own record labels. And sometimes we don't reach for the stars, sometimes we are satisfied with what people tell us we are supposed to be satisfied with and I'm just not going for it.”

The Carters welcomed their first child, a baby girl, Blue Ivy Carter in 2012. And in 2017, the couple had twins, a boy and girl, Sir and Rumi Carter. “My mother taught me the importance of not just of being seen, but of seeing myself. As the mother of two girls, it's important to me that they see themselves, too—in books, films, and on runways. It's important to me that they see themselves as CEOs, as bosses, and that they know they can write the script for their own lives, that they can speak their minds and they have no

ceiling. They don't have to be a certain type or fit into a specific category. They don't have to be politically correct, as long as they're authentic, respectful, compassionate, and empathetic. They can explore any religion, fall in love with any race, and love who they want to love."

Carter performed as the halftime entertainment at the 2013 Super Bowl. "I remember growing up watching the Super Bowl with my family. I knew I had to make the best of the moment and I wanted it to be something iconic, something that people would never forget." During the performance, Carter surprised the audience by reuniting the women of "Destiny's Child." "[Performing] is my passion. It's why I breathe. It's what I dream. I strive to keep perfecting and getting better, knowing I always have room to grow."

By 2013, Carter had won 16 Grammy Awards. In 2010, she received six Grammys, at the time, the most wins in a single night by a female artist. She tied the record for most number one hits on Billboard's Pop Songs chart and made the Forbes Top 10 list of entertainment's highest-earning women. "My life was award shows and tour buses and hotels. It kind of goes by so fast. You're getting awards and people are saying how much they respect you. I couldn't even hear it anymore, I was just like, 'thank you, thank you, thank you.' [I was] just thinking about the next shoot, the next video, next single, next tour."

Carter returned to the Super Bowl stage again in 2016 with Bruno Mars and Chris Martin of Coldplay. The performance highlighted her single "Formation," where the song, lyrics, video and halftime show gained attention for touching on political topics from Black Power to Hurricane Katrina. "It's important to me that I help open doors for

younger artists. There are so many cultural and societal barriers to entry, that I like to do what I can to level the playing field, to present a different point of view for people who may feel like their voices don't matter. Imagine if someone hadn't given a chance to the brilliant women who came before me. They opened the doors for me, and I pray that I'm doing all I can to open doors for the next generation of talents."

Following her second Super Bowl performance, Carter released the album "Lemonade." It debuted at number one, making Beyoncé the only artist in history to have all of her first six studio albums reach the top of Billboard's charts. "I have a lot of awards and a lot of things that are amazing, and I worked harder than probably everybody I know to get those things. But, nothing feels like my child saying 'Mommy.' Nothing feels like when I look in my husbands' eyes. Nothing feels like when I am respected, when I get on the stage and I see I'm changing people's lives. Those are the things that matter and at this point in my life, that's what I am striving for; growth, love, happiness, fun, enjoying my life. It's short."

“Staying Strong”

Demi Lovato

Dallas, Texas

"Life is precious and it's what you do with it that keeps you alive on the inside. It's not enough just to live and take that gift for granted. Each one of us has fears, but the more we work to overcome them, the more we are able to enjoy our lives."

Demi Lovato is known for her powerful vocals and authentic songwriting. She is also known for being open about her struggles with addiction, mental illness and eating disorders.

Lovato started her acting career at the age of 10 in her first real gig on “Barney and Friends.” After her debut, she continued to book acting jobs making appearances in “Prison Break” and “As the Bell Rings.” At 15, she caught her big break when she was cast as the lead in the Disney Channel movie, “Camp Rock” with the Jonas Brothers and her music career began to take off. “I definitely started to feel the pressure increase when fame started to creep into my life. I started feeling pressure to look a certain way, to sing music that I felt like people would like, rather than sing music that I would like. There was more pressure to succeed. I was a perfectionist and I really wanted to be the best of the best.”

To deal with the pressures of becoming a teenage sensation, Lovato turned to drugs. “My dad was an addict and an alcoholic and I guess I always searched for what he found in drugs and alcohol, because it fulfilled him, and he chose that over his family.” While touring, acting and performing, Lovato was dealing with a serious drug addiction behind the scenes. “I was not easy to work with, I was using while I had a sober companion. I went through about 20 sober companions. I didn’t feel anything. I didn’t feel guilty. I didn’t feel embarrassed. I was either craving drugs or on drugs. I would sneak out to get drugs. I would fake my drug tests. I would lie straight to their faces. It’s embarrassing to look back at the person I was. I went on a bender of like two months, where I was using daily. There was one night where I used a bunch of coke and I popped a few Xanax bars and I started to choke a little bit. My heart started racing and I remember thinking, ‘I might be overdosing right now.’”

The breaking point occurred in 2011 when Lovato was 18. Her manager threatened to drop her as a client, due to her addiction and the difficulties it created for those around her. She gave up her phone, her connection to drug dealers and the negative influences in her life and agreed to get treatment. “I think that approach worked for me because it was the beginning of the process of surrendering. At the end of the day, it was my decision.”

In treatment, Lovato was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Following her time in treatment, she moved into a sober facility where she remained sober for six years. In 2018, Lovato released her single “Sober,” where she revealed she relapsed and experienced an opioid overdose.

Lovato has also battled an eating disorder since she was a young girl. “When I was young and started working I was under a lot of stress. I would bake cookies for my family and I would eat all of them, so nobody would have any to eat. That was my first memory of food being a medicine for me.” While Lovato was able to maintain sobriety for six years, she still struggles with an eating disorder. “The less I have to think about food the easier it is for me to go on having a normal life. I don’t want to let anybody down, so when I have moments where I slip up I feel very ashamed.”

Amidst all her struggles, Lovato has won a number of awards, including five People's Choice Awards, a Billboard Women in Music Award and 14 Teen Choice Awards. Her latest album “Tell Me You Love Me” opened at number three on the US Billboard 200 with 48,000 copies sold in the first week. Her album release was followed by the release of her YouTube documentary, “Simply Complicated,” where she shows her life, struggles and journey to sobriety. In the documentary, Lovato reveals that music was what helped her through the struggles she faced. “When I look back on my life I feel like if I didn’t have music, I don’t know what I would have. I have my friends and my family, but music gave me a purpose when I was bullied in school. It gave me the motivation to keep going and proved to everyone who didn’t believe in me that I was going to be something someday. I know what music can get you through. I know what music can do emotionally for somebody, because I’ve experienced it myself and I wanted to create that for people. There’s nothing more beautiful than being able to connect with people through music in my eyes.”

Beyond music, Lovato is an advocate for mental health and body positivity. In 2017, she launched an activewear line for all shapes and sizes in partnership with Fabletics.

While she still struggles with her own issues, she encourages others who are battling addiction, mental illness and eating disorders to get help. “You really have to lean in to the people who are trying to support you. You really have to surrender, because that’s when the change is going to happen.”

“Be Kind to One Another”

Ellen DeGeneres

Metairie, Louisiana

"Find out who you are and be that person. Find that truth, live that truth, and everything else will come."

Actress, writer, producer, author, television host, comedian – Ellen DeGeneres has done it all, but her path to success has not been without controversy or set-back. She has become one of America’s most well-known comedians and talk show hosts, the voice of Dory in “Finding Nemo” and “Finding Dory,” a prominent lesbian role model and an advocate of LGBTQ rights.

DeGeneres grew up in Louisiana and had various jobs before she found her place in comedy. From waiting tables to selling vacuum cleaners, painting houses and working as legal secretary, DeGeneres gained experience in an array of fields. Growing up, her older brother was always considered the comedian of the family. But one day, while DeGeneres was speaking at an event, she made jokes to distract from her stage fright. She was a hit with the crowd and soon after, her career in stand-up comedy began.

“I watch people's behavior and notice things. I think that's why I became a comedian. I notice how stupid the things we do are. You know, like writing the word

"over" on the bottom of a letter. As if someone's just going to throw the letter away without trying to turn it over first. Or, when you taste something that tastes bad, you always ask someone else to taste it just to make sure. I started noticing all these behaviors. Then, that turned into comedy.”

At 23, DeGeneres began performing stand-up at small clubs and coffeehouses in New Orleans. By the early 1980s, she started to tour nationally, and in 1984, Showtime named her “Showtime's Funniest Person in America” at age 26. In 1986, she garnered an appearance on “The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson,” which solidified her place in the comedy spotlight.

DeGeneres' comedy career became the basis of her sitcom “Ellen” from 1994 until 1998. During the last season of the show, her character came out as lesbian in an episode. Soon after, DeGeneres came out in real life. The show, “Ellen,” experienced falling ratings and the show was cancelled after the fifth season. According to DeGeneres, her support from the straight community dwindled and she received criticism from gay viewers for not being political enough.

“Even though I had a big foundation with my career and years of work, it just divided everyone when I came out. Simply by saying, ‘I’m gay,’ even though I was the exact same person, divided everyone. People stopped watching the show, so some advertisers pulled out. It didn't matter that I was a good, devoted, loyal employee. It was just a huge dose of reality for me. But, losing it all really gave me time to realize that all this stuff is very fleeting. If success is really dependent on someone liking you or not liking you, and you have to teeter on that kind of tightrope of how you're supposed to act

and how you're supposed to look and who you are, it's just not a healthy way to live. Now I get to be me every single day and not have to worry about hiding anything at all.”

Over time, DeGeneres returned to stand-up comedy and re-established herself as a talk show host. She has been the host of her award-winning talk show, “The Ellen DeGeneres Show,” since 2003. DeGeneres is a clean comedian, meaning her show is family friendly and on during the day. She ends every show with the words “be kind to one another.” The show features a lot of dancing, celebrities and giveaways to her studio audience. “The world's a scary place, you know? It can be really sad and stressful and negative. I try to counterbalance that. I believe everything in life is energy. If we're destroying our trees and destroying our environment and hurting animals and hurting one another and all that stuff, there's got to be a very powerful energy to fight that. I think we need more love in the world. We need more kindness, more compassion, more joy, more laughter. I definitely want to contribute to that. I really want my time here to be positive and productive.”

Among her collection of awards are the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor and 32 Emmy Awards. She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2016 from President Barack Obama for her contribution to the arts. DeGeneres has also hosted several major awards shows including the Grammys, The Emmys and The Academy Awards. She is the author of three books and has worked as an executive producer for several television shows including “Repeat After Me,” “One Big Happy,” “Little Big Shots” and her own reality competition show, “Ellen’s Design Challenge.”

DeGeneres married actress Portia de Rossi in 2008, after California legalized gay marriage. In 2010, de Rossi was granted permission to legally change her name to Portia DeGeneres.

“I'm not an activist; I don't look for controversy. I'm not a political person, but I'm a person with compassion. I care passionately about equal rights. I care about human rights. I care about animal rights. Above all, I strive to be the best I can [be], to be better than I was yesterday and better tomorrow.”

“Like a Kloss”

Karlie Kloss

St. Louis, Missouri

“Girls are stronger in numbers. So, I believe girls should stick together whenever possible.”

When she is not walking a runway or in a photo shoot, she has a passion for learning, particularly computer coding. Karlie Kloss is a 6’2” supermodel turned computer scientist.

Kloss started modeling at the age of 14, she caught the eye of a modeling scout at a charity fashion show and her career began to take off. She has since modeled for the biggest names in fashion. Kloss has appeared as a Vogue cover girl more than 36 times. While her modeling career has been successful, underneath all the glamor, Kloss has a passion for computer programming.

The 26-year-old got her first taste of programming in 2014, when she attended a two-week boot camp to learn the basics. There she began to learn several different web development programs. "I didn't go into this with the plan to build a nonprofit, I really went into all this out of my own curiosity of wanting to learn what the heck coding was, because it was building massive enterprise value for people in a short period of time."

While attending the boot camp, Kloss noticed she was one of the only women in the room. Girls Who Code reported that while 74% of middle school girls express interest in STEM topics and careers, only 0.4% of high school girls choose to pursue them in college. "I was curious, why are there not more women in this space? I realized, here I am with this platform to reach young women across the country and around the world. If I could just help a handful of girls, that would be really meaningful."

The following year, Kloss personally sponsored and wrote scholarships for teenage girls to attend the same program she attended. "I had millions of girls following me on Instagram, so I put out a video saying, 'If you want to learn how to code, I'm underwriting scholarships.' We had thousands of girls apply for 20 spots."

That summer, she launched her own nonprofit organization, Kode With Klossy and hosted a free two-week summer camp for teenage girls in New York, Los Angeles and St. Louis. Kloss personally handpicked the teachers and wrote the curriculum for the program. The camp has since expanded to 25 cities across the U.S. and served over 1,000 women. "There are so many young women who really could change the world with this kind of opportunity, girls who self-select out because they don't see others in the industry that look like them."

Kloss has redirected her modeling contracts with companies such as Adidas, Swarovski and Express to fund and support Kode With Klossy initiatives. She chooses to work with "partners that really are excited to work with me because of not just what I look like, but because of what I stand for."

For now, the aim of the nonprofit is to continue expanding to new cities and offering more ways for young girls to get involved in computer coding. While modeling

around the globe and running the nonprofit, Kloss recently started a YouTube channel where she makes vlogs and beauty videos. She will also appear as a judge on season 17 of “Project Runway.”

“A New Kind of First Lady”

Michelle Obama

Chicago, Illinois

“There are still many causes worth sacrificing for, so much history yet to be made.”

She identifies herself simply as, “a girl from the South Side.” But to many Americans, Michelle Obama represents hope, confidence, hard work and perseverance. Her time as first lady to the 44th U.S. President is nothing short of inspirational.

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. She says she grew up in a loving home with her mother, father and older brother. In discussing her college dreams with her high school counselor, she told Michelle Obama “you’re not Princeton material.” But, despite the opinions of those who doubted her abilities and likelihood to succeed beyond high school, she attended and graduated from Princeton, majoring in Sociology.

After graduating Cum Laude from Princeton, Michelle Obama went on to attend Harvard Law School. While at Harvard, she worked for the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, where she focused specifically on assisting low-income tenants with housing cases. She credits much of her success to her female role models and mentors. “You don’t do anything alone and I think a lot of young people look at people like us and think ‘you just

magically appeared, you became and there you are,' and it's like no, I always looked ahead of me, at the women primarily who were doing the things that I wanted to do.”

Following law school graduation, Michelle Obama joined the Sidley Austin law firm in Chicago, where she was assigned a summer intern, Barrack Obama. The two dated for several years and married in 1992.

Shortly after their wedding, Michelle Obama decided she was unhappy practicing law and moved on to hold several public sector positions, worked for non-profits and served as the Associate Dean of Student Services at the University of Chicago. “The first thing that I had to overcome was my own guilt because when you spend so much time and money, in my case, taking out student loans, I came out of law school with a lot of debt. Especially growing up as a working-class kid. You know, I talk about the conversation I had with my mother where I was trying to break down how I wasn't passionate about my career and I feel guilty talking to a woman who had sacrificed so much for me and probably never had the luxury of thinking about something as trivial as passion.”

The Obama's have two daughters, Malia and Sasha. In her book, “Becoming,” Michelle Obama spoke openly about her first pregnancy ending in a miscarriage. “I felt lost and alone, and I felt like I failed because I didn't know how common miscarriages were, because we don't talk about them. We sit in our own pain, thinking that somehow, we're broken. I think it's the worst thing that we do to each other as women, not share the truth about our bodies and how they work, and how they don't work.” By speaking out, Michelle Obama seemed to normalize the conversation about reality of miscarriages for many women.

After her husband's decision to run for president, Michelle Obama received a lot of criticism throughout the campaign. Fox News columnist Cal Thomas described her as an "angry black woman." She responded, "Barack and I have been in the public eye for many years now, and we've developed a thick skin along the way. When you're out campaigning, there will always be criticism. I just take it in stride, and at the end of the day, I know that it comes with the territory."

When Barack Obama won the election and the Obama family moved into the White House, Michelle Obama stepped into her role as first lady. She hosted women's rights activists at the White House, launched initiatives such as Let's Move! Reach Higher, Let Girls Learn and Joining Forces. She served as an advocate for military families, worked to highlight women and their career-life balance and promoted the arts in schools. She appeared on talk shows, promoted LGBTQ rights and became a fashion icon in the process. Michelle Obama's time as first lady redefined the role.

While she has been encouraged, Michelle Obama does not plan to pursue a political career of her own. At the end of her autobiography she states, "I have no intention of running for office, ever. Politics can be a means for positive change, but this arena is just not for me." Since leaving the White House, she has chosen to focus on her family, but still remains active speaking out on social media.

“Overcome”

Oprah Winfrey

Kosciusko, Mississippi

"It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from. The ability to triumph begins with you. Always."

Her face and voice are recognizable from television, movies, radio and magazines. She is known for giving generous gifts to her talk show audience and making donations to charitable organizations, but Oprah Winfrey grew up in poverty. She was born to an unwed teenage mother in rural Kosciusko, Mississippi. Her first name was actually spelled "Orpah" on her birth certificate after the biblical figure in the book of Ruth, but people often mispronounced it and "Oprah" stuck.

Winfrey spent the first years of her life under the care of her grandmother, living in poverty on a farm while her mother looked for work in the North. “I think that success is a process. And I believe that my first Easter speech, at Kosciusko Baptist Church, at the age of three and a half, was the beginning. And that every other speech, every other book I read, every other time I spoke in public, was a building block. So that by the time I first sat down to audition in front of a television camera, and somebody said, ‘Read this,’

what allowed me to read it so comfortably and be so at ease with myself at that time, was the fact that I had been doing it a while.”

At age six, Winfrey moved to Milwaukee to live with her mother who found work as a housemaid. During the seven years she lived with her mother, Winfrey suffered repeated sexual abuse by several male relatives. At 13, Winfrey attempted to run away and ended up in a juvenile detention home. However, the detention home was full with no room for Winfrey to stay there. By age 14, Winfrey found herself pregnant and on her own. Her son, Canaan, was born prematurely and died in infancy.

Winfrey then moved to Nashville to live with her father. “As strict as he was, he had some concerns about me making the best of my life and would not accept anything less than what he thought was my best.” While living with her father, Winfrey became an honor student. At 17, she won the Miss Black Tennessee beauty pageant and was offered a job on-air at WVOL, a radio station for the black community in Nashville. In high school, Winfrey won an oratorical contest and received a full scholarship to Tennessee State University, where she majored in communications and performing arts.

Winfrey left college to pursue a broadcast career and by age 22, she had moved to Baltimore to work as a co-anchor for the local evening news. She also co-hosted the talk show “People Are Talking” at the same station. “I only came to co-host a talk show because I had failed at news and I was going to be fired. From the very first day I did my very first talk show, I knew it. I knew it was the right thing to do.” At 30, Winfrey moved to Chicago to host a low-rated morning show, “AM Chicago.” The show grew in ratings and a year later it was renamed, “The Oprah Winfrey Show.”

One year after the show was renamed, it became the number one talk show in national syndication. “The Oprah Winfrey Show” received three Daytime Emmy Awards: Outstanding Host, Outstanding Talk/Service Program and Outstanding Direction. The following year, Winfrey became the youngest person to receive the International Radio and Television Society’s “Broadcaster of the Year” Award.

The success of her broadcast career led to her acting debut. Winfrey portrayed Sofia in the Steven Spielberg film, “The Color Purple.” Her performance earned her nominations for an Oscar and a Golden Globe Award as Best Supporting Actress. “When I heard that there was going to be a movie [of “The Color Purple”], I started talking it up for myself. I didn’t know how on earth I would get in this movie. I’d never acted in my life. But, I felt it so intensely that I had to be a part of that movie. I really do believe that I created it for myself. I wanted it more than anything in the world and would have done anything to do it.”

Following her acting debut, Winfrey formed her own production company, Harpo Productions. The company acquired all production responsibilities for “The Oprah Winfrey Show,” which made Winfrey the first woman to own and produce her own talk show. On the show, Winfrey focused on spiritual values, healthy living and self-help. She interviewed top celebrities, including Michael Jackson, whose interview drew 100 million viewers, making it the most watched interview in television history.

Winfrey initiated a campaign to establish a national database of convicted child abusers and testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee on behalf of the National Child Protection Act. In 2000, Winfrey began presenting a \$100,000 “Use Your Life” Award to people who are using their own lives to improve the lives of others. She

launched the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in Johannesburg, South Africa. And in 2003, Winfrey became the first African-American woman to become a billionaire. “What other people view as successful is not what my idea of what success is. And I don’t mean to belittle it at all. It’s really nice to be able to have nice things. What material success does is provide you with is the ability to concentrate on other things that really matter. And that is being able to make a difference, not only in your own life, but in other people’s lives.”

In addition, Winfrey has written five books and publishes two magazines. She produced and starred in the film “Beloved,” written by Toni Morrison. She produced “Their Eyes Were Watching God,” based on the Zora Neale Hurston novel. Winfrey produced the Broadway musical “The Color Purple” and has since been a voice actress in several animated films including “Charlotte’s Web” and “The Princess and the Frog.”

After concluding 24 seasons of “The Oprah Winfrey Show,” she announced the launch of the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN), where she now hosts “Oprah’s Lifeclass.” In 2013, President Barack Obama awarded her the nation’s highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

“Notorious R.B.G.”

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Brooklyn, New York

"Women belong in places where decisions are being made."

Ruth Bader Ginsburg is the second female justice to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. She is an advocate for gender equality and has become known, in the world of pop culture, as the Notorious R.B.G.

Growing up in a low-income, working class neighborhood in New York, Ginsburg learned the value of a good education. "My mother told me two things constantly. One was to be a lady, and the other was to be independent. The study of law was unusual for women of my generation. For most girls growing up in the '40s, the most important degree was not your B.A., but your M.R.S." In high school, Ginsburg worked hard and excelled in her classes. She graduated high school at age 15. She later attended Cornell University where she graduated with a degree in government and was the highest-ranking female in her graduating class. After graduation, Ginsburg married her law classmate, Martin Ginsburg and went to work for the Social Security Administration in Oklahoma. That following year, she became pregnant and gave birth to her first child, a daughter, Jane.

The fall of 1956, Ginsburg enrolled at Harvard Law School as one of only eight women in a class of 500. At Harvard, Ginsburg learned to balance life as a new mother and a law student. The Dean of Harvard Law School reportedly asked Ginsburg and her fellow female classmates, “Why are you at Harvard Law School taking the place of a man?” She later transferred to Columbia Law School because of her husband’s job and became the first woman to be on two major law reviews: Harvard Law Review and Columbia Law Review. Ginsburg graduated from Columbia Law School as one of 12 women in her class and tied for Valedictorian.

Although she had success in school, Ginsburg encountered gender discrimination and struggled to find employment. “You think about what would have happened. Suppose I had gotten a job as a permanent associate. Probably, I would have climbed up the ladder and today I would be a retired partner. So often in life, things that you regard as an impediment turn out to be great good fortune.” She applied for several law clerk positions but remained unemployed until 1960 when she began her clerkship for a Judge. After two years as a clerk, Ginsburg became the first female tenured professor at Rutgers Law School. However, she was paid less than her male colleagues because “she had a husband with a well-paying job.” Ginsburg continued teaching law and later became the first female tenured professor at Columbia University, as well.

In 1977, Ginsburg founded and directed the Women’s Rights Project at the American Civil Liberties Union, where she participated in over 300 gender discrimination cases. As director, she argued six landmark gender equality cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and won five of the cases. One of the cases involved a portion of the Social Security Act that favored women over men because it granted certain benefits

to widows, but not widowers. “Judges at that time thought that laws discriminating against women were for the women’s own protection. So, my job was to let the court see that these classifications more often put women not on a pedestal, but in a cage.” Her last case as a lawyer before the Supreme Court challenged the validity of voluntary jury duty for women. Ginsburg argued that participation in jury duty was a citizen’s governmental service and should not be optional for women.

At age 47, Ginsburg was nominated by President Jimmy Carter to a seat on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in 1980. There she served until President Bill Clinton appointed Ginsburg to serve as a member of the U.S. Supreme Court. She was the first Jewish justice in over 20 years and the second female justice after Sandra Day O’Connor. “When I’m sometimes asked, ‘when will there be enough [women on the Supreme Court]?’ And I say, ‘When there are nine.’ People are shocked. But there’d been nine men, and nobody’s ever raised a question about that.” Ginsburg offers a strong voice in favor of gender equality, the rights of workers, and the separation of church and state. In 1996, Ginsburg wrote the Supreme Court’s decision in the *United States vs. Virginia* case. The decision stated that the Virginia Military Institute could not refuse to admit women.

In 1999, Ginsburg was diagnosed with colon cancer. While undergoing surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy, Ginsburg did not miss a day on the bench.

Now 86, Ginsberg is still serving on the U.S. Supreme Court. Reflecting on her legacy, she said, “I hope that people will think of me as a good judge who tried with whatever ability I had to interpret the law wisely and to keep it in tune with people who the law should exist to serve.” She continues to promote women’s rights from the High

Court. Regarding her retirement, Ginsberg said, "Now I happen to be the oldest. But John Paul Stevens didn't step down until he was 90."

She has become a fashion icon, sporting her collection of robes and lace jabots from around the world. When she is not on the bench, she enjoys working out and attending the opera. In 2013, Ginsberg officiated a same-sex wedding. In 2018, the film "On the Basis of Sex" was released. The film was written by her nephew, Daniel Stiepleman and was based on her life. Felicity Jones portrayed Ginsberg in the film.

On her "Notorious R.B.G" status, Ginsburg said, "I think a law clerk told me about this Tumblr and also explained to me what Notorious R.B.G. was a parody on. And now my grandchildren love it and I try to keep abreast of the latest that's on the Tumblr. I have a supply of Notorious R.B.G. t-shirts that I give to law clerks and other people as well."

“The Woman Behind Your Behind”

Sara Blakely

Atlanta, Georgia

“I did not have the most experience in the industry or the most money, but I cared the most.”

You can thank her for creating a product to make your ‘behind’ look great! You may not recognize her name, but you have probably worn her products. Sara Blakely is the founder and CEO of Spanx, the shapewear and lingerie company based out of Atlanta, Georgia. Blakely is the first female self-made billionaire, but her journey to success wasn’t easy or conventional.

After graduating from Florida State University with a Communications degree, and failing the LSAT twice, Blakely accepted a job at Danka selling fax machines door-to-door. For a business event, Blakely wanted to wear a pair of cream pants that had been hanging in her closet unworn, because she could not find the appropriate garment to wear underneath. “I decided to cut the feet out of control top pantyhose, and I threw them on under my white pants, and went to the party. I looked fabulous, I felt great, I had no panty lines, I looked thinner and smoother, but they rolled up my legs all night. And I remember thinking, ‘This should exist for women.’”

With a fresh idea and \$5,000 in savings, Blakely, then 27, spent the next two years developing her product while still working at Danka during the day. “I'd never taken a business class, I'd never worked in fashion or retail. I'd actually been selling fax machines door-to-door for seven years, since graduating from college. I'd just moved out of my mom's house, and I was dating a loser.”

Blakely traveled from her home in Atlanta to North Carolina, where the majority of the United States hosiery mills are located. She planned to pitch her idea to some of the hosiery companies. But at the time, the hosiery manufacturing industry was overseen solely by men that didn't use the products they produced. So, they didn't understand or see the need for Blakely's product idea. “I'd walk in to the mill and they would always say, ‘And you are...?’ And I'd say, ‘Sara Blakely.’ And they'd go, ‘And you're with...?’ I'd say, ‘Sara Blakely.’ They go, ‘And you're financially backed by...,’ and I go, ‘Sara Blakely.’ And then they would always say, ‘Oh, it's so nice to meet you Sara Blakely, but we're not interested. Have a nice day.’”

After getting rejected by every mill she visited that trip, Blakely drove home to Atlanta. Two weeks later she received a call from one of the mill owners who said he had thought about her offer and he wanted to create her product. When Blakely asked him why he changed his mind, he said he had told his wife and daughters about her idea and they loved it.

While Blakely was pitching her idea to potential manufacturing companies, she needed a patent to protect her idea. She could not afford to pay a lawyer to write one for her, so she bought an instructional book at Barnes & Noble and wrote the patent herself.

She purchased the “Spanx” trademark for \$150 online and with the help of the hosiery mill, created the first prototype.

Early in the company’s history, Blakely was able to arrange a meeting with a representative from Neiman Marcus. “In the middle of my meeting with her I could tell I was losing her, and I knew it was my one shot, so I said, ‘you know what Diane? Why don’t you come with me to the bathroom? I want to show you my product before and after.’” After proving the value of her product, Neiman Marcus agreed to sell Spanx in seven stores.

Around the same time, Blakely sent a public relations package of Spanx to Oprah Winfrey explaining her product. In November of 2000, Oprah named Spanx one of her favorite things and they began to fly off department store shelves. Spanx then landed five minutes of airtime on QVC, where Blakely sold 8,000 pair.

In the 19 years since, Spanx has grown to more than just pantyhose. Spanx makes leggings, bras, panties, apparel and now denim. In addition to the various products, Blakely started the Sara Blakely Foundation to empower women through education and entrepreneurial training. In 2006, Blakely donated \$1 million to the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls. In 2013, she became the first female billionaire to be a part of the Bill Gates Giving Pledge, where the world’s richest people donate at least half of their wealth to charity. Her next goal is to create the world’s most comfortable high heel shoe for women.

“Game Changer”

Sarah Thomas

Brandon, Mississippi

"Don't set out for the recognition. If you work hard, the recognition will come. You need to believe in yourself."

She was the first woman to officiate a college football bowl game, the NFL's first female official and the first woman to officiate an NFL playoff game.

Sarah Thomas grew up as an athlete in small town Mississippi. She lettered five times in high school softball and went to college on a basketball scholarship to the University of Mobile in Alabama. “When I was in fifth grade, my aunt Jo asked me ‘Are you going to play basketball?’ I said, ‘Well they don’t have a girls’ team.’ And she said, ‘So you should go out for the boys’ team. They put their pants on just like you do.’”

Thomas never set out to be a pioneer. In 1996, she and her older brother attended an officials meeting. “We were on the phone one day and, unbeknownst to me, he was on his way to an officials meeting. And I said, ‘Can girls do that?’ And he was just like, ‘I guess so.’ And that’s how it all started.”

Thomas began officiating grade school football games and as she got more experience, she moved up to high school. She worked her first varsity game at a local

high school in 1999. She refereed high school games for 10 years, then college games for eight. While officiating a high school championship game, an NFL scout recognized her talent. "He recognized something I did on the field and he got me plugged in with [retired referee] Gerald Austin. I went to Division 1 and it changed my career."

In 2013, Thomas became one of 21 finalists for a permanent NFL officiating position. She was awarded the position and in 2015 during a match-up between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Houston Texans, Thomas became the NFL's first female official.

After four years as an NFL official, Thomas continues studying and learning. She watches and re-watches plays each game to better her performance, works out regularly and eats healthy to stay in shape. "[As an official] you have to be able to take constructive criticism. You have to have an air of confidence—a swagger—but not any cockiness. You need a sixth sense. You can't take things personally. That's all a reflection of my upbringing and my years of playing sports."

Thomas insists she has not been treated any differently because of her gender. She is not intimidated by coaches yelling at her or talking to players three times her size. Confidence is key. "You can still be a woman, you can be attractive, and whatever way you carry yourself speaks volumes to the reception. When we carry ourselves with confidence, and walk into a room with confidence, the atmosphere kind of changes."

When she is not on the field in her striped uniform, Thomas juggles family responsibilities and her full-time job as a pharmaceutical sales representative. She lives in Brandon, Mississippi with her husband, two sons and a daughter.

“Queen of the Court”

Serena Williams

Compton, California

"The success of every woman should be the inspiration to another. We should raise each other up. Make sure you're very courageous: be strong, be extremely kind, and above all be humble."

She's a fierce athlete, an advocate for gender equality and body positivity, a mother, a philanthropist and a fashion icon. She has even been featured in a Beyoncé music video, Serena Williams does it all.

Serena Williams learned to play tennis at the age of four. She is the youngest of five daughters. Growing up, Serena Williams and her sister Venus Williams quickly took the tennis world by storm. "A lot of people say, 'Oh she's talented, she's athletic.' No, actually I wasn't. I was really small for my age. I had to work really hard. I think that's one of the reasons I fight so hard." By the time Serena Williams was nine, the sisters were training at the tennis academy of Rick Macci in West Palm Beach, Florida. However, the girls' father pulled them out of the academy after experiencing racism among white parents and their father went on to coach them himself.

At 16, Serena Williams was ranked number 99 in the world tennis rankings. A year later, she won her first Grand Slam tournament. “A big significant first for me was winning my first Grand Slam. I was so young, I was 17 and I was just overwhelmed with joy. There is really no feeling in the world like that.” Since her professional debut, Serena Williams has won 23 Grand Slam titles and four Olympic gold medals.

Serena Williams attributes much of her success to training with and playing against her sister Venus Williams. “Playing [against] Venus is like playing myself. We grew up playing together. She’s my toughest opponent. She’s tall. She’s fast. She hits hard like me. She serves like me. She knows where I’m hitting the ball before I hit it. On the court we are mortal enemies, but the second we shake hands we are best friends again. We have an incredible love and respect for one another.”

Throughout her professional career Serena Williams has both won and lost to her sister. The two have met 16 times in Grand Slam tournaments. “[Venus] has done so much for me. I think one of the hardest jobs in the world is to be an older sister and I think Venus is an amazing older sister. She is a great role model for me, I love having that relationship.”

While Serena Williams has experienced a lot of wins on the court, she has had her fair share of losses. “I hate to lose, but I think that losing is what brought me here today. The reason I am who I am is because of my losses. Some of them were extremely painful, but I wouldn’t take any of them away because every time I lose I learn so much from it. I don’t live in the past, I live in the present and don’t make the same mistakes in the future.”

In 2018, Serena Williams suffered the worst loss of her career when she was knocked out of the first round of the Silicon Valley Classic. Since her professional debut, she had never before lost a match without winning at least two games. “I was completely shattered, I was really sad, I didn’t leave my house for two days. I was in a bad place and the place got smaller and it got darker and worse and worse. I had to learn to mentally let that go.”

As a young tennis sensation, Serena Williams struggled to appreciate her athletic body. “When you’re a teenage female growing up in the public eye, you face a lot of scrutiny. As any female teenager, I definitely was not comfortable in my body. I didn’t like it. I stopped lifting weights. But, I realized my body helped me reach goals that I wanted to reach. I was so appreciative of it. I was healthy. I felt like, not only am I happy with my body but I want other young girls to be happy with themselves. Whatever people say, [that I am] masculine, too much, too little, I am okay with it as long as I love myself.”

One way Serena Williams is encouraging body confidence in young women is through the launch of her fashion line, Serena. The company’s slogan is “be seen, be heard.” The clothing line features inclusive sizing for both men and women. “When I was thinking about who we are designing for I didn’t want a certain age or a certain body type or a certain look. I wanted to throw that all out, this is for the woman who believes in herself and wants to show it by wearing something really fabulous.”

In 2016, Serena Williams announced her engagement to Alexis Ohanian and the couple married in 2017, but not before she gave birth to their daughter, Olympia. “I found out [I was pregnant] two days before the Australian open, which is one of the biggest

Grand Slams. I was nervous, I didn't know what to think. I didn't know if I could play, it is dangerous in the first 12 weeks or so. I had a lot of questions." Serena Williams went on to play in the tournament and she won. But, the birth of her daughter came with many complications that caused her to spend the following six weeks in bed, too weak to get up on her own much less, swing a tennis racket. Her desire to play tennis again, however, never wavered. "I think every experience can make you stronger, I don't let anything break me."

After several months of recovery, Serena Williams got back on the court. "I'm not done yet. I'm really inspired by my sister. She is a year older than me and if she is still playing, I know I can play. My story isn't over yet."

“Silence Breaker”

Tarana Burke

The Bronx, New York

"We are stronger together."

Tarana Burke believes she was born to be a voice in the fight for a world free of sexual violence. Her bravery and activism as the founder of the #MeToo movement have given hope to many who struggle in the journey to heal from sexual violence.

Long before the launch of the #MeToo movement, Burke began making a difference in her community. After graduating college, she started a non-profit organization called Just Be. The group was a support system that focused on the overall well-being of young black girls. While having a discussion, one of the young women told Burke she had been sexually assaulted. Burke said that at the moment, she was speechless. Later, when reflecting on the conversation, she wished she would have said, “You’re not alone. This happened to me, too.” And the #MeToo movement was born. "On one side, it's a bold declarative statement that 'I'm not ashamed' and 'I'm not alone.' On the other side, it's a statement from survivor to survivor that says 'I see you. I hear you. I understand you and I'm here for you or I get it.'"

Shortly after, Burke officially founded the #MeToo Movement, a worldwide campaign to raise awareness about sexual harassment, abuse, and assault in society. “I laid across a mattress on my floor in my one-bedroom apartment frustrated with all the sexual violence I saw in my community. I pulled out a piece of paper and wrote ‘me too’ at the top of it. And I proceeded to write out an action plan for a movement based on empathy between survivors that would help us feel like we could heal, that we weren’t the sum total of the things that happened to us.”

The movement really began to take off in 2017 following the sexual abuse allegations of Hollywood film producer, Harvey Weinstein. “Our colleagues are speaking up and speaking out. Industries across the board are reexamining workplace culture. And families and friends are having hard conversations about closely held truths. And then there’s the backlash...we’ve all heard it. Suddenly, a movement that was started to support all survivors of sexual violence is being talked about like it’s a vindictive plot against men. Men are not the enemy, and we have to be clear about that.”

The hashtag, #MeToo has since been used more than 19 million times on Twitter. “This is a movement about the one in four girls and the one in six boys who are sexually assaulted every year and carry those wounds into adulthood. It’s about the 84 percent of trans women who will be sexually assaulted this year. And the indigenous women who are three and a half times more likely to be sexually assaulted than any other group. Or people with disabilities who are seven times more likely to be abused. It’s about the 60 percent of black girls, like me, who will be experiencing sexual violence before they turn 18. And the thousands and thousands of low-wage workers who are being sexually harassed right now at jobs they can’t afford to quit. This is a movement about the far-

reaching power of empathy. It's about the millions and millions of people who raised their hands to say, 'me too' and their hands are still raised."

Time magazine named Burke, along with a group of other prominent female activists named "The Silence Breakers," as Person of the Year for 2017. Burke is currently serving as the Senior Director at Girls for Gender Equity. The organization puts on workshops to help improve policies at schools, workplaces, and places of worship, and focuses on helping victims not blame themselves for sexual violence. "Our work rethinks how we deal with trauma. For instance, we don't believe that survivors should tell the details of their stories all the time. We shouldn't have to perform our pain over and over again for the sake of awareness. We also try to teach survivors to not lean into their trauma, but to lean into the joy they curate in their lives instead. And if they don't find it, create it, and lean into that instead."

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