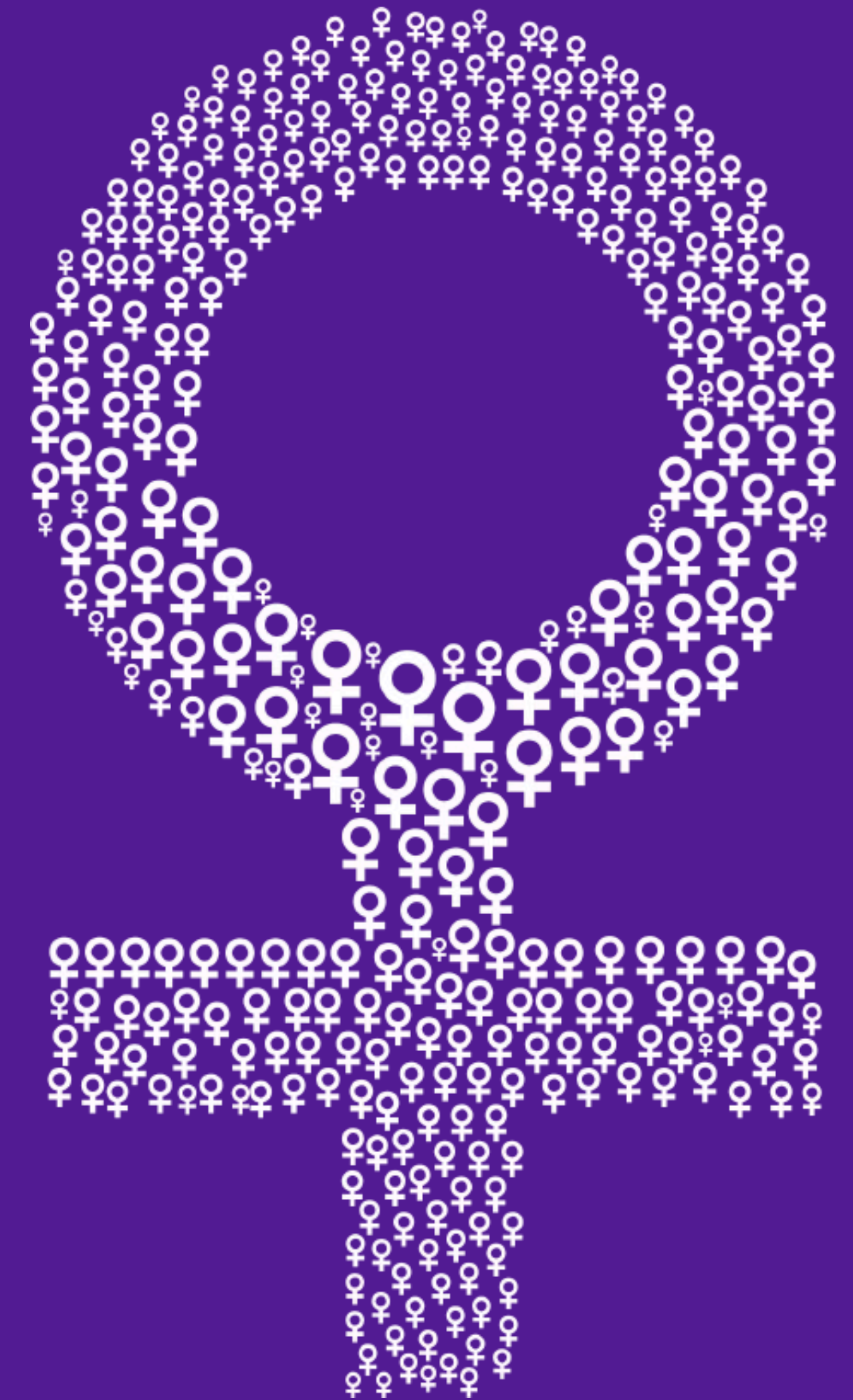


# WHAT WOMEN WANT

HOW TO APPEAL TO WOMEN IN THE #METOO ERA





WHAT WOMEN WANT

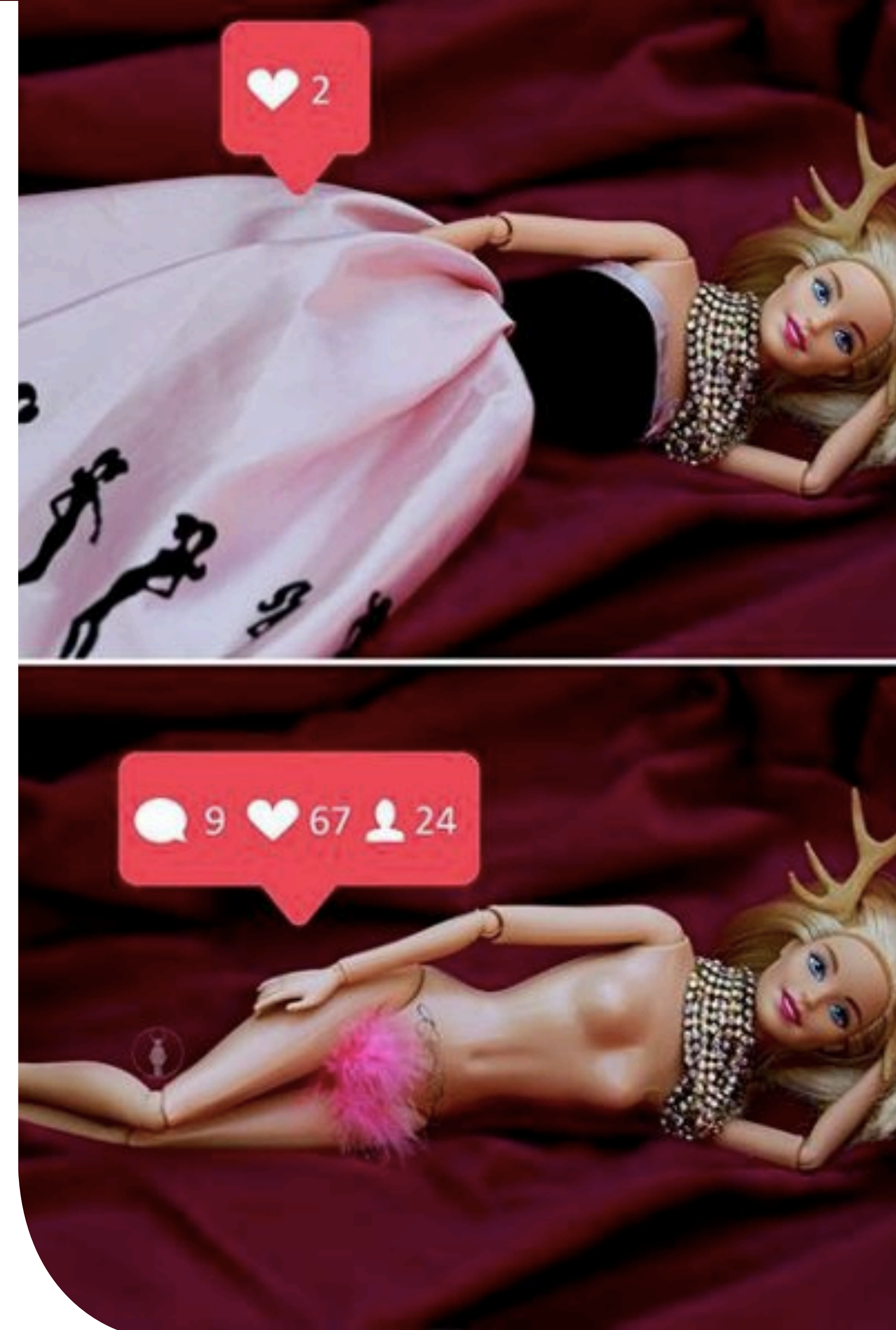
HOW TO APPEAL TO WOMEN IN THE #METOO ERA

# WHAT DO WOMEN WANT IN THE #METOO ERA?

Femininity and perceptions of femininity have shifted considerably over the last 100 years. Most recently, the #MeToo movement has helped catalyze social change by challenging perceptions of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. As a result there is greater uncertainty today than ever before about what it means to be a woman.

**This report seeks to address the question: what do women today want aspirational femininity to mean?**

Based on current research and evidence-based thinking we look at the changing nature of femininity, exploring the new female identities that are emerging in culture. We offer our perspective on what women are looking for to help guide marketers in both appealing to and empowering women moving forward.





# WHAT IS FEMININITY?

Femininity is a distinctive set of physical, psychological and behavioral characteristics that typically help to define the difference between men and women.

A combination of nature and culture have set traditional perceptions of femininity:

**Physically**, women tend to be smaller, lighter, less muscular, with narrower shoulders, larger foreheads, heart-shaped faces and plump lips.

**Psychologically**, women tend to be characterized as more 'empathic' and 'expressive', with a strong positive relationship with agreeableness and conscientiousness

**Behaviorally**, women tend to be more person-orientated and nurturing (as opposed to dominant), more passive, more gentle and more collaborative.

However, women are increasingly challenging both the ways these feminine characteristics are portrayed and the fundamental assumptions underpinning them. This has implications for society and for marketers.





# TRADITIONAL DEPICTIONS OF FEMININITY ARE BEING REJECTED

Marketing has historically depicted women through a simplistic lens of femininity. This has been typified as 'Pink it and Shrink it'. Recent examples of this approach include Bic's pink and purple pens "for her"; Dell's cutesy laptop Della; Pritt Sticks Just 4 Girls; or Cadbury's Crispello chocolate bar 'for women'

But 'pink' is not a strategy, especially today, as femininity is more political than ever and women are increasingly active in rejecting lazy and stereotypical portrayals of gender.

Equally, while it is tempting for marketers to tap into this political energy, it is tricky terrain. Perceived tokenism or band-wagoning that is not credible or consistent with company actions, principles or history is quickly called out and can easily backfire.

Brands wishing to associate with femininity in a meaningful and purposeful way must first understand the aspirations and goals of the women it is wishing to connect with.





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# THE LANDSCAPE OF FEMININITY TODAY



BRAND GENETICS



# WOMEN ARE ON A JOURNEY



## THE FIRST WAVE 1848–1920

### EMANCIPATION

Female Emancipation  
Political Equality  
Women's Suffrage



## THE SECOND WAVE 1963–1980

### EQUALITY

Social Equality  
Reproductive Rights  
Status in the Workplace



## THE THIRD WAVE 1991–2012

### ESCAPE CONVENTIONS

Education on Gender Issues  
Greater Representation  
Challenge Conventions



## THE FOURTH WAVE – TODAY

### EMPOWERMENT

360° female empowerment  
#MeToo movement  
Inclusivity



# FEMININITY IS IN FLUX BUT CURRENT RESPONSES TO CHANGE ARE STILL CONSTRAINED

## TRADITIONAL FEMININITY

Traditional female traits (physical, psychological and behavioural) used to differentiate women from men and define womanhood

SOCIAL  
CHANGE

## HYPER FEMININITY

Responding to change by adopting exaggerated and extreme stereotypical traits by 'owning' their bodies and celebrating a specific female look

## POWERFUL FEMININITY

Responding to change by adopting traditionally masculine characteristics such as strength and competitiveness

## PERFECTIONIST FEMININITY

Responding to change by portraying perfection, seeking to embody the post-feminist ideal to excel at everything



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# HYPER FEMININITY

Hyper femininity is an extreme version of traditional femininity, emphasizing the value of a specific female look in an image-obsessed world. It sees women adopting stereotypical traits, 'owning' their bodies and celebrating an exaggerated feminine look – and the advantages it can give them

This has come to the fore with the rise of the hyper feminine entrepreneur. Leveraging the power of social media, these hyper feminine figureheads self-objectify, utilizing their physical attributes as the root source of authority and influence to drive business.

**Example:** From KKW beauty to Kylie Cosmetics, the Kardashian sisters have built an empire based on hyper femininity, making a living from self-objectification, having undergone extreme surgical procedures to achieve the perfect hyperfeminine look





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# POWERFUL FEMININITY

Powerful femininity sees women adopting traditionally masculine characteristics - such as strength and competitiveness - to succeed. In appropriating these characteristics women who aspire to powerful femininity are seeking to demonstrate their equal status.

In this context we see the shift from Kate Moss's infamous 'nothing tastes as good as skinny feels' mantra to the #StrongNotSkinny philosophy - with women adopting physical prowess as a symbol of both physical and emotional strength.

**Example:** The increase in participation and screening of women's team sport sees powerful femininity playing out with women combining masculine characteristics of physical strength and competitiveness with traditionally feminine traits of collaboration.

The UEFA Women's Euro 2017 attracted a TV audience of 150 million and in 2018 a new world record attendance for a women's club soccer game was set when 51,211 attended the finale of the 16-team Liga MX Femenil in Mexico.





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# PERFECTIONIST FEMININITY

Perfectionist femininity is about projecting success in all domains – career, domestic life, relationships and leisure – embodying the millennial ideal of ‘having it all’.

‘Superwomen’ who aspire to this, feel they must succeed in the ‘man’s world of business’, as well as achieve ‘the good life’ at home – as a domestic goddess, a loving partner and a great parent – while demonstrating self-care and staying in great physical shape.

This ‘Little Miss Perfect’ narrative (a quarter of seven to ten year-old girls feel the need to be perfect) is challenging for many young women today. The impossibility of achieving such perfection leaves many feeling like they’ve failed as women.

**Example:** The brainchild of the impossibly successful, wealthy and beautiful actress Gwyneth Paltrow, Goop is a lifestyle and wellness brand that gives career, relationship & sex advice to enable women to achieve the ‘good life’, succeeding in all life domains.

A \$6 Billion Move / The New Soft Money / Bowie's Back

# TIME

DON'T HATE HER

BECAUSE SHE'S

# SUCCESSFUL

Facebook's **Sheryl Sandberg** and her mission to reboot feminism

BY BELINDA LUSCOMBE





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# TOWARDS A BROADER EXPRESSION OF FEMININITY



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# WOMEN DON'T WANT TO BE LIMITED BY STEREOTYPES

While there are biological, psychological and behavioural differences between men and women, these are not deterministic. Increasing bodies of research show that personality, rather than gender, is a better predictor of individual character traits.

Women today are increasingly rejecting the notion they must fit into a binary world of 'femininity' or 'masculinity' (indeed psychologists view masculinity and femininity as mutually exclusive rather than polar opposites). Instead, women are looking to not just expand the range of femininities they can 'choose' from, but be free to choose their own positive identity.

The most positive forms of femininity we see emerging encourage women to build on the positive traits of their gender - not be restricted by it - and making their own rules, rather than having to conform to the any reductive gender codes.





# THE FUTURE OF FEMININITY IS FLUIDITY

*RECESSIVE*

*CURRENT*

*EMERGENT*

## TRADITIONAL FEMININITY

Traditional female traits (physical, psychological and behavioural) used to differentiate women from men and define womanhood

SOCIAL  
CHANGE

## HYPER FEMININITY

Responding to change by adopting exaggerated and extreme stereotypical traits by 'owning' their bodies and celebrating a certain female look

## POWERFUL FEMININITY

Responding to change by adopting traditionally masculine characteristics such as strength and competitiveness

## PERFECTIONIST FEMININITY

Responding to change by searching for perfection seeking to embody the post-feminist ideal to excel at everything

## UNCONSTRAINED FEMININITY

Responding to change by positively reframing traditional female traits & championing character strengths that go beyond traditional gendered boundaries



WHAT WOMEN WANT

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# WOMEN WANT TO MAKE THEIR OWN RULES: UNCONSTRAINED FEMININITY

The key insight from positive psychology is that people feel stronger and happier when they actively use their signature character strengths.

Unconstrained femininity seeks to champion every woman's freedom to build on their character strengths, both positively reframing traditional female traits & championing strengths that go beyond traditional gendered boundaries.

Rather than going to extremes with either hyper femininity (women adopting exaggerated stereotypical traits), powerful femininity (women adopting traditionally masculine strengths) or perfectionist femininity (women striving to 'have it all'), unconstrained femininity gives women the freedom to be feminine use their signature character strengths.



## JAMEELA JAMIL

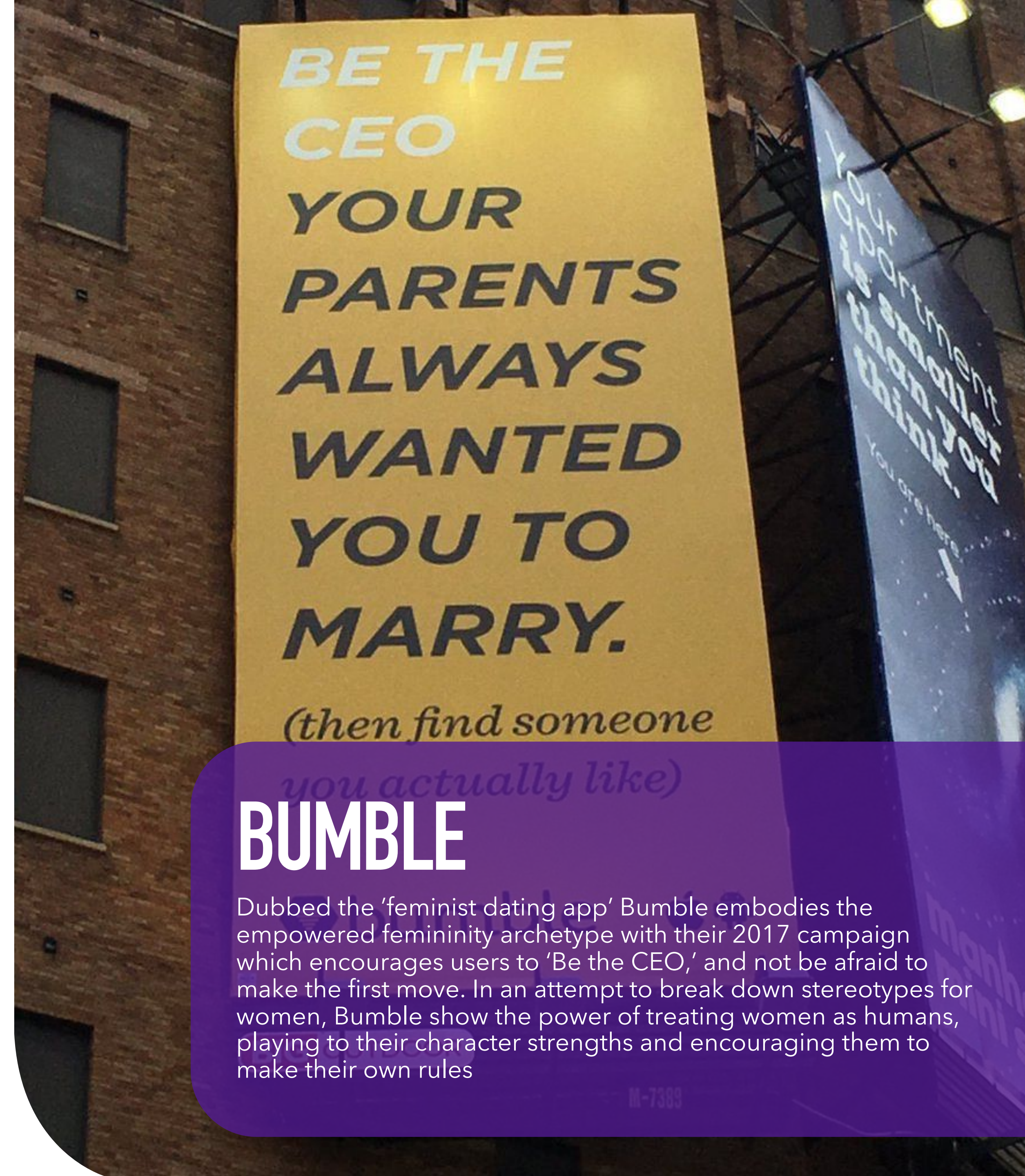
Jameela Jamiil is an actress (starring in Netflix 'The Good Place') who uses her platform to help empower young women, most notably with her iweigh project which encourages women to celebrate their positive character strengths rather than define themselves by their self-image



A photograph of two women, one white and one Black, standing with their backs to the camera. They are wearing matching beige, high-waisted, seamless underwear. The woman on the left has her hands clasped behind her back, and the woman on the right has her hands on her hips. They are standing on a light-colored floor against a plain white background.

# HEIST

Tights brand Heist is disrupting the hosiery category by designing real woman, using advertising that celebrates femininity in all its varieties. At its heart, heist champions individual strengths, "it is about letting you be you rather than fitting into a predefined category " says Heist's head of community Ellie Howard

A photograph of a large billboard for Bumble. The billboard is yellow and features the text "BE THE CEO YOUR PARENTS ALWAYS WANTED YOU TO MARRY." in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. Below this, in a smaller, italicized font, it says "(then find someone you actually like)". The billboard is set against a brick building at night. To the right of the billboard, a portion of another billboard is visible, showing the text "Don't let them tell you think you are here..." and an arrow pointing down.

**BE THE  
CEO  
YOUR  
PARENTS  
ALWAYS  
WANTED  
YOU TO  
MARRY.**

*(then find someone  
you actually like)*

# BUMBLE

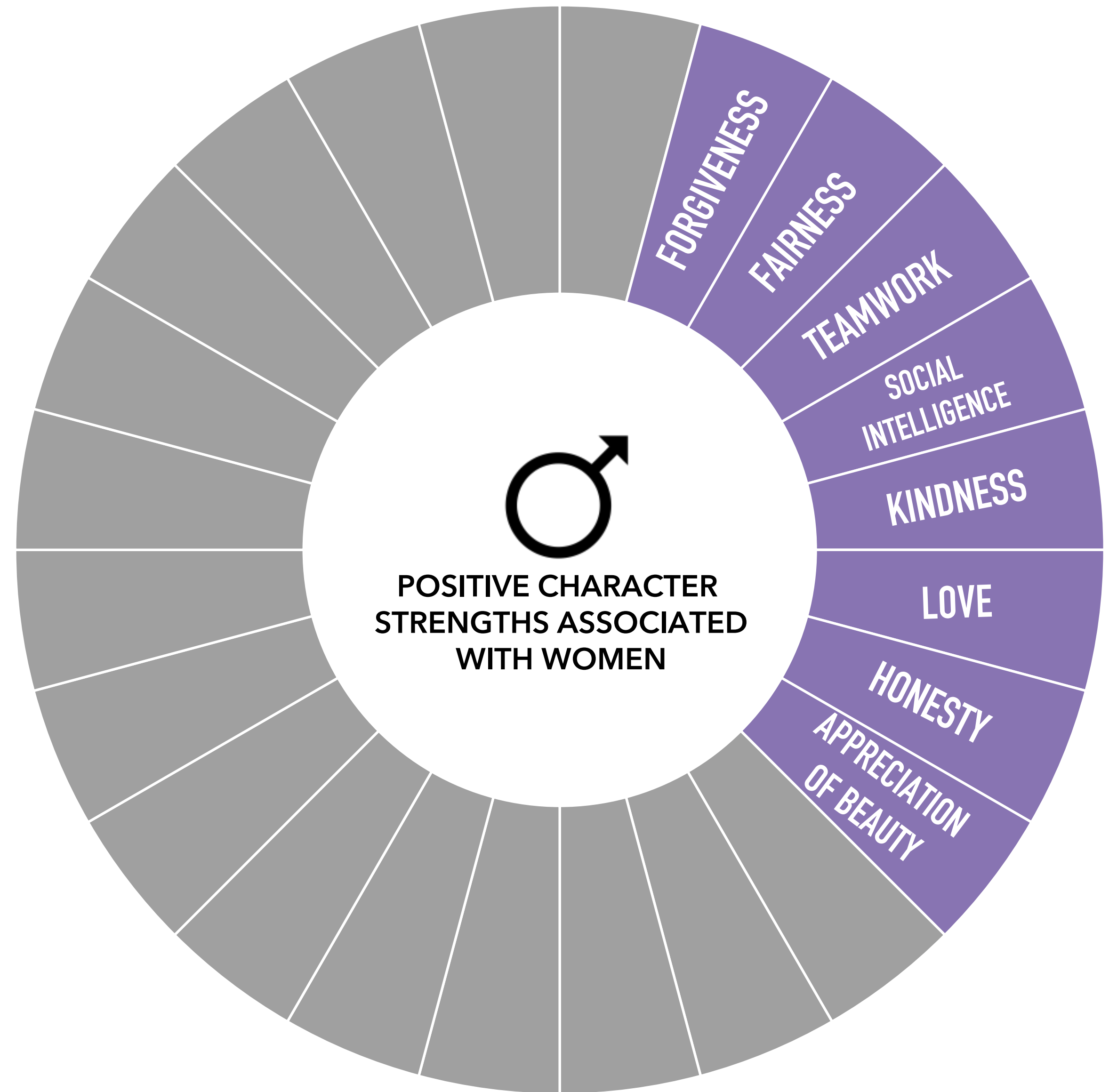
Dubbed the 'feminist dating app' Bumble embodies the empowered femininity archetype with their 2017 campaign which encourages users to 'Be the CEO,' and not be afraid to make the first move. In an attempt to break down stereotypes for women, Bumble show the power of treating women as humans, playing to their character strengths and encouraging them to make their own rules



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**UNCONSTRAINED  
FEMININITY ALLOWS  
WOMEN TO EMBRACE  
AND POSITIVELY  
EXPRESS THEIR  
FEMININITY...**



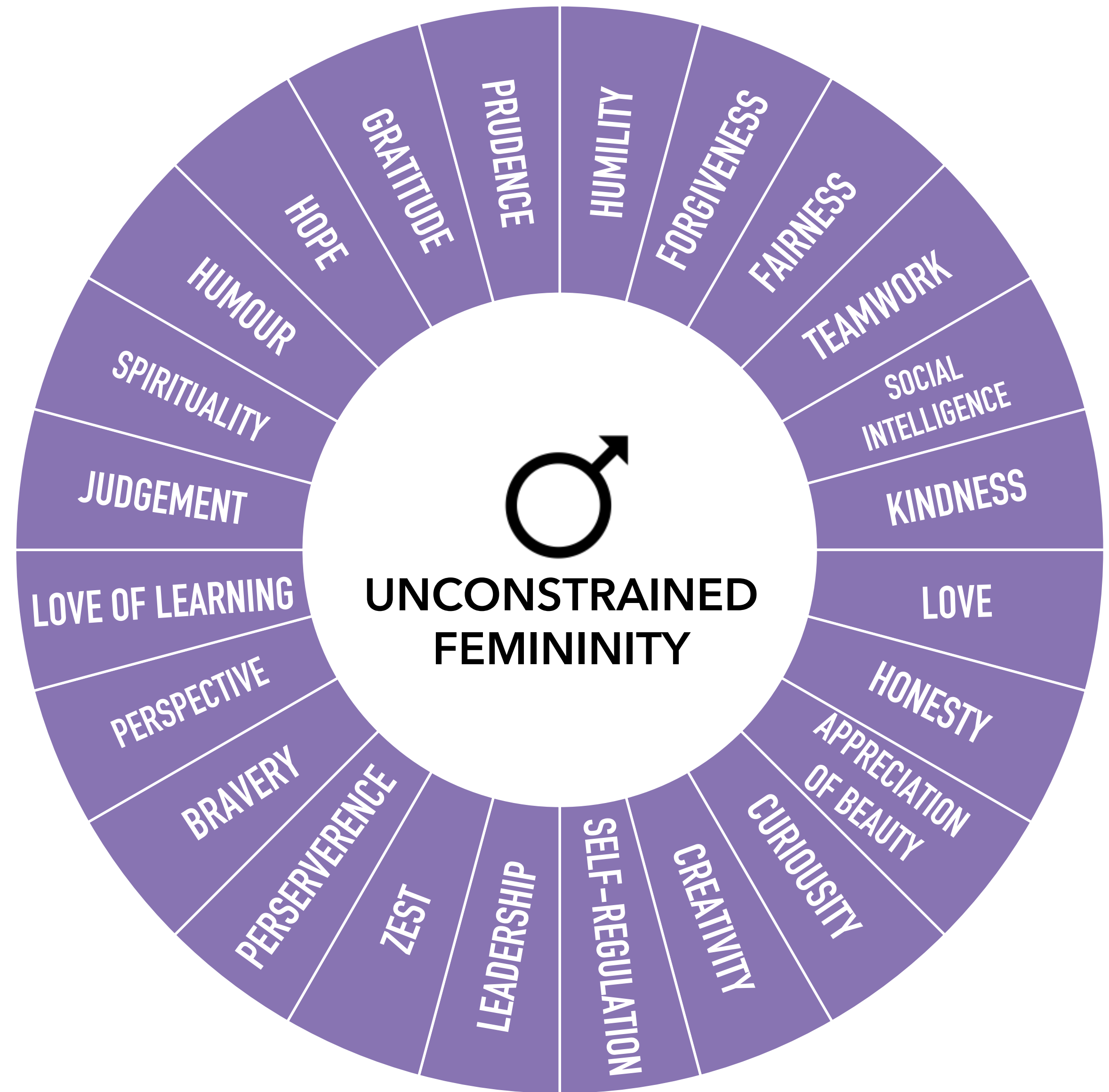
Unconstrained Femininity celebrates women's traditional positive character strengths as identified by VIA (Values in Action) inventory of 24 human character strengths)



WHAT WOMEN WANT

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.... AS WELL AS  
THEIR SIGNATURE  
CHARACTER  
STRENGTHS AS  
HUMAN BEINGS



Unconstrained Femininity builds on the VIA inventory of 24 human character strengths by championing positive character traits that stretch beyond traditional gender associations



# CONCLUSION: WOMEN WANT...

## INSIGHTS FOR MARKETING

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- 1 Freedom to choose their identity.** There is no longer a singular form of femininity - so move away from reductive (and often outdated) stereotypes by celebrating diverse femininities and championing difference in thought and behavior.
- 2 To be strong.** Help women move beyond the constraints of traditional 'feminine' expectations by celebrating strengths: building positively on those strengths associated with women but also different 'signature' strengths as individuals
- 3 To be human not superhuman.** Avoid promoting perfectionist values by championing realistic depictions of women - success is not about excelling at everything, it's about excelling in the areas that make you feel happier and stronger
- 4 Unconstrained role models.** Depict women who successfully live happy, healthy and fulfilled lives by both playing to their strengths as women and also using personal strengths that challenge old stereotypes
- 5 Brands that celebrate female strengths and reflect their personal values.** Female-focused brands that champion their own more feminine traits - but also celebrate brand strengths that challenge gender norms - will hold increasing appeal.



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# TAKE THE VIA STRENGTH TEST

WHAT ARE YOUR POSITIVE CHARACTER STRENGTHS?

## Join over 6 million people

who have learned to improve their quality of life with the only free, scientific survey on character strengths.

Research reveals that people who use their strengths every day are:

- 3x more likely to report having an excellent quality of life
- 6x more likely to be engaged at work

[Take the free VIA survey](http://viacharacter.org)

<http://viacharacter.org>





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# GET IN TOUCH

## We understand what women want!

If you want to know what the changing face of femininity means for your brand, we'd love to hear from you.

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