

Meghan: At this point in the series, I think we've established that I spent a lot of time in front of the TV growing up. I loved movies and shows. I had my favorite programs. And, as we continue to unearth – with *Archetypes* – many of them can be influenced by pop culture and by the media.

Growing up in the eighties and nineties, my generation, we were raised with television in the same way that this generation is raised with social media. But we didn't have that then – there was no Instagram or TikTok. You couldn't even record shows unless you had a blank VHS tape that you could race to queue up at the exact time so you'd hope not to miss your favorite show.

For Gen Z listeners, you're going to have to Google or I guess TikTok what I'm even talking about. But for those of you who remember these days, you'll also remember the shows that you were always ready for. Now, for me, this was Jeopardy!

CLIP: *This is Jeopardy! Here are today's contestants...*

Jeopardy was my favorite show growing up, and I would eat my dinner on a TV tray in front of the screen, watching each category and clue with bated breath and intense focus, trying to absorb whatever facts they were firing off in the form of a question. My obsession with this show was so deep. You guys, when Alex Trebek passed away, I started to receive texts of condolence. I didn't know him, but everyone who knew me knew how meaningful Jeopardy – and its host – were as a daily part of my life. This love of facts extended into my love of words, etymology, grammar, admiring people with expansive vocabularies. I was, and I still am, a word nerd.

And to that point, I can think of many words that begin with... oh, I don't know - let's just go with the letter B. Beautiful, blessed, brilliant, beguiling, blissful, bedazzling. And yet when you hear someone say the B-word, I think we're all clear that none of the words that I just said is what they're talking about. It's referring to instead... You know what? I'll just let someone *e/se* lead the charge here...

Robin: I call my girlfriends “bitch” all the time. I'm like, “Hey, bitch, you look good bitch,” like all that kind of stuff. But if a man is like, you know, “Oh, you ugly bitch” or something like that, I mean, I'm mortified and offended and I want to fight.

That is none other than the very talented — and also my fellow alumna — Robin Thede.

Robin: Oh hello! I'm a comedian. A writer. I created a show on HBO called *The Black Lady Sketch Show*. And, you know, I'm a fellow wildcat with Meghan.

Meghan: Woo! It's true. I was always more of a mild cat. Let's be honest.

Robin: *laughs*

So yes, Robin and I both went to Northwestern University, outside of Chicago – And Robin and I, we’re right around the same age. So we grew up with a lot of the same messages around this word – this very charged word – and what it meant to be characterized in that way.

Robin: I do think that for me in this body, in this 42-year-old body now, if someone calls me that I don't really care. I really don't like, I can be offended, but I'm not like, hurt to my core. But 25-year-old me - oh! would have been shaken to the ground and scandalized!

Meghan: But so what's the difference between 25-year-old you versus 42-year-old you?

Robin: I think the difference is, now it's like, oh, it's just a word. Okay, that word doesn't mean anything because whoever is saying it, I'm just like, you don't know how to use your words. You just resorted to the easiest slur that you could find because you're not smart enough to articulate whatever else you're trying to say.

And this word, she's right about that because it's sadly, for whatever reason, really easy to resort to for a lot of people. It's just, it's one of those labels that feels like it's thrown around constantly. And while its usage certainly has undertones that say a lot about the person who's speaking, there's still a specific type of woman who tends to be the recipient...

Robin: Even in 2022 and beyond, it's still just used to describe a woman who goes after what she wants, who has an opinion that's different from a man's, you know, who turns you down at the club.

In other words... I think what Robin's getting at – and what these people are implying when they use that very charged word – is that this woman... oh, she's *difficult*. Which is really just a euphemism, or probably not even a euphemism, it's really a code word for the b-word.

And yet, Robin is one of the many women who've made a choice to embrace the b-word, and almost reclaim it.

Robin: If we're going to hear it anyway, right, we're going to hear it in violent situations. God forbid. We're going to hear it in songs where it's not being used positively. We're going to hear it in the trolling comments. Then we have to offset that. Just numbers wise, we need to offset it. And I love that women have used this phrase bad bitch as a positive thing, like you're a bad bitch. Like, you know, you look amazing. You've got a great job, you're doing your thing, you know? And so for me like, like I think about Lizzo, you know, she says is bad bitch o'clock!

FADE IN / FADE OUT - ARCHIVAL – LIZZO: IT'S BAD BITCH O'CLOCK!

Robin: I'm like, yes, bad bitch o'clock. That's what time I want it to be all the time!

Meghan: Oh, Robin... that's what time it is, precisely, in a very funny sketch called – “Bad B-Word Support Group” – on Robin's show – *A Black Lady Sketch Show*...

BAD BITCH SUPPORT GROUP CLIP 1: *Listen, being a bad bitch is an honor. We didn't choose this life, this life chose us. Sometimes I just want to sit down for 5 minutes without wearing a waist trainer! Oh this hoe trying to take deep breaths?! Yes! Breathe when you die, hunny, okay. Bitches, please!*

Robin: For me, like, I do think it helps offset all the negativity associated with it. And I do think it takes the air out of it. I know it does. And all that to say, that, if I want to call something Bad Bitch Support Group, that's why. 'Cause I wanna tell you, like, well someone's gonna call you a bitch, I'm gonna call you a bad bitch and tell you how amazing you are. *laughs*

BAD BITCH SUPPORT GROUP CLIP 2:

Well, there's nothing wrong with being an okay bitch. What?! Oh, this bitch done lost her mind. As long as you're not a basic bitch... Okay, she found it!

Meghan: I can't! I mean, for a person who hates the word so much, this is giving me hives. Nevertheless, I will say, it's all really interesting to me, what Robin is talking about. Because, as you may have guessed, I have zero interest in reclaiming this term. But these women I respect, whose work I love, a lot of them are entirely comfortable with that; they want to do that to take the power of it.

And what's even more interesting is that for people who study the animal world, like zoologist Lucy Cooke, author of... okay, I'm not actually going to say the first word... I'm just gonna call it "The B-word: A Revolutionary Guide to Sex, Evolution and the Female Animal." This approach to that word, it actually has a really interesting parallel here, and it's a strong comp... especially in the context of this larger notion of *difficult women*, who are threatening the *human* social order...

Lucy Cooke: Being masculine is being aggressive and dominant. And being feminine is being submissive and nurturing. But, you know, it really annoys me, these labels

because, actually being feminine, you know, amongst the animal kingdom involves being aggressive and promiscuous and competitive and dominant and dynamic and varied and all the things that males are. So these distinctions between masculine and feminine, I think are, are cultural, not biological. You know, I don't think the word bitch should be a swear word. Why should being a bitch be a bad thing?

So perhaps the truth is... that labeling a woman as the b-word, or as difficult – is often a deflection. A way to hide some of her really awesome qualities: her persistence, her strength, her perseverance, her strong opinion, maybe even her resilience. And those are the very qualities we're gonna be uncovering today...

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INTRO

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<< INTRO THEME BEGINS >>

Meghan: I'm Meghan. And this is ARCHETYPES – my podcast about the labels and tropes that try to hold women back.

So in this episode, I'm sitting with two women, who've pushed through all sorts of boundaries to get where they are today... and who, as great leaders and businesswomen, and also, both friends of mine, too – they're no strangers to these labels...

Melody: I had one person once tell me – you know, you're very intimidating. And I said, "Well, you choose to be intimidated by me. I'm not!" I literally said to him, I said, "That's you, not me."

Meghan: That's Melody Hobson – the co-CEO of Ariel Investments and chair of the board of Starbucks. She's a mentor, and she's incredible. And we're also going to be hearing from...

Victoria: I really am grateful for probably all the people that did tell me I was too ambitious or, you know, difficult.

Meghan: Cosmetics entrepreneur and medical advocate, as well as, just all around good egg, Victoria Jackson.

These are really incredible stories of resilience, perseverance, and success. I learned a lot in talking with these ladies, and I think you will too. You don't want to miss this. That's all coming up, right after the break.

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ACT 1
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Meghan: Okay so – calling someone the b-word, labeling them as "difficult" – it's often a way to insult and dismiss someone. I was talking to a good girlfriend of mine this past weekend... and when I saw her, she said something I had never heard before and she said, "well isn't that a convenient villain?" An assertive woman, in a position of power, being called the b-word? How very convenient. But that's what happens when we label someone – a woman especially – one of these words. It becomes a way to take their power away, keep them in their place. And a lot of times, it's tied to the very women who *have* power and agency... as my friend was suggesting... who aren't comfortable being silent. Like businesswomen and entrepreneurs.

Melody: Hello.

Meghan: Hi.

Melody: How are you, friend?

Meghan: I'm good. How are you doing? Oh, it's so nice to see you. How was um, before we jump in, how was Summer? Oh, I'm so envious. I wish I had just been living la dolce vita with you.

Mellody: Uh, it was – everything was good.

Meghan: Well I'm glad you're back. Are you in Chicago right now?

Mellody: No, I'm actually in San Francisco. So, yeah...

Meghan: Oh! Closer than usual!

Meghan: You can't talk about drive, determination and perseverance – especially for an American businesswoman – without talking about Mellody Hobson. I mean, who else starts out as an *intern* at an investment firm... and rises through the ranks becoming president and Co-CEO? Well after graduating from Princeton in 1991, Mellody, she did just that – at Ariel Investments in Chicago.

And because she's just so impressive, let's be clear – her accolades don't end there. She's been spotlighted on seemingly more lists than you can count – including *Time's* 2015 Time 100 List, and the *Forbes'* 2020 list of the World's 100 Most Powerful Women. And in 2017, Mellody became the first Black woman to chair the Economic Club of Chicago, and just a few years later, she was named chair of the board of directors for the Starbucks Corporation... the *first* Black woman to be chairperson of an S&P 500 company.

And if all of that isn't enough to make you go, "who is Mellody Hobson?" Well she also made a name for herself as an advocate for financial literacy – with her TED Talk, which went viral, and her guest spots on CBS News...

CBS NEWS CLIP: *I'm Mellody Hobson, and in this Eye On America, our eye is on retirement... Ideally, you're earmarking 15% of your income for retirement by now. But if you're already doing that, you may be wondering what else can I do to prepare? Here are three suggestions...*

Meghan: Throughout her career, Mellody has worked incredibly hard to have a seat at the table. And yes, we'll hear, a lot of the time, those tables have been full of men. To get ahead – without being automatically labeled as "difficult" – she had to hone a special skill set. And to be heard, to be respected, she needed grit, kindness, determination, and perseverance.

Qualities she surely learned during her childhood... being the youngest of six children, raised by a strong single mother in Chicago in the 70s and 80s...

Mellody: My mom was very unique. She gave me the hard truths of life with so much love and support. But she never wanted me to go through life not being prepared for all

that would come. So she taught me what to expect as a Black woman and a Black person, and I really do appreciate that aspect of her - I call it brutal pragmatism, but with so much love. She was devoted to me and to my siblings. She struggled a lot to make ends meet. So as a result of that, we had a very uneven and oftentimes challenging existence where we would get evicted or our phone would get disconnected, our lights would be turned off, our cars would be repossessed. I remember my mom borrowing gas from the gas station to get me to school.

MUSIC IN

Meghan: So let's just be reminded of everything I told you Mellody has since accomplished – it's astounding and so inspirational, and all from these humble beginnings, where Mellody was – in her own words – desperate to understand money... because they didn't have any, she wanted to understand the power of that currency. So she quickly learned how to be self-sufficient and care for herself – a trait underscored by her mother's slightly, let's call it *unconventional*, parenting style.

MUSIC OUT

Mellody: I joke with people. This is true. I found my own orthodontist. I went to the appointment by myself.

Meghan: What?!

Mellody: I had these horrible teeth.

Meghan: How old were you? What are you talking about?

Mellody: I was in sixth grade.

Meghan: No! You found your own orthodontist and went to the appointment by yourself?

Mellody: I asked all of my friends who their orthodontist was and called and made an appointment because I had these - a fang, you know, one of those teeth that sticks up top. It was so awful. Even I knew I couldn't go through life like that. And so I went to the orthodontist alone and I'm like, you know, what? How old are you in sixth grade? 12? 13? I don't even know.

Meghan: 12, 12. Yeah.

Mellody: So I, the orthodontist sees me and he's like, you know, you need braces. He's explaining all of this to me. Dr. Thompson was his name. And after he told me everything I said, he told me it was \$2,500. He's telling this to a 12 year old! Which shows how special he was, I have to say. And so he says it's \$2,500. And I said, well, we don't have that kind of money. And he gave me a payment plan.

Meghan: Oh my gosh.

Melody: He gave me a little booklet. And then I went home and told my mom and explained the whole thing to her. And I went back and got braces.

Meghan: Wow.

Melody: But my mom wasn't surprised. It was like, you know, of course she did. But it wasn't because, again, I was like thrown to the wind. It was just like if I wanted to do things, I had to figure it out every time. Just like something as simple as going to a birthday party. If I wanted to go to a birthday party, my mom would say, "How are you going to get there? How are you going to get home? What are you going to do about a present?" And I knew I had to come prepared with all of those answers or I couldn't go.

Meghan: I have to rethink my parenting style because if that is, if that's what yields you, then I've really got to up my game with our kids being self-sufficient. What's so great about the orthodontist story, specifically, is that if you look at that training that you're getting by default at 12 or 11 years old, however old you are, to know that you're asking for what you need and figuring out a way to get it... And it's, it's working. But as you get older – when you're not this, you know, 11 or 12 year old and you're growing into a woman – that that same understanding of knowing what you want, asking for what you need, that can sometimes be thrown back in your face, like, as though you're being "difficult" or something. Pushy.

MUSIC IN

Meghan: So for you... you grow up, you graduate from Princeton, you get into the business world... did you feel like you needed to change your behavior, or your way of doing things?

Melody: You know, I was taught really early on in business that people act in their own self-interest. And so in advocating for what you want or need, you have to help them to see why it's in their best interest too. And so I think that helped me take the edge off of some of that advocacy. And I think where women get a bad rap, which is undeserved, so please know that I am not in any way being critical – if we do exactly the same way that a man does it. You know, we're met with a - just a much different sense of perception versus reality. I tell people this all the time. I meet people and they say to me very frequently, "You're so much nicer than I thought you would be."

Meghan: Oh. Okay. Where do you think that comes from and how do you respond to that?

Melody: I think it comes from this idea that I'm going to be this angry, militant Black woman. But I find it so fascinating that people speak the words, you're so much nicer than I thought you would be. But just the idea that that is a part of the early conversation

says a lot about people's perception of ambition – which I proudly am ambitious – and successful women.

MUSIC OUT

Meghan: Mhm. This is taking me right back to when we both did The New York Times' DealBook Summit... back in 2021... and when we were talking about advancing women's equality. One of the things I remember that you had said – it stuck with me – this quote from The Art of War... was that what it was?

Melody: Yeah. Crouch to conquer.

Meghan: And that has stayed with me so much that idea, can you for people who haven't heard that explain what that means to you. Because I think this speaks to this idea of how women present themselves or are perceived and what you, you know, sometimes could feel like you need to do.

Melody: So I use this line that I use a lot, which is from the book Art of War, which says sometimes you have to crouch to conquer. And I tell people, I do believe sometimes you have to be small to be very big. You are making the choice. Someone's not making you small, you are. I see it in myself, sometimes I modulate.

The example that I give... I was on a board with someone once years and years and years ago, and the person is a giant figure in some ways and – or was – And every single time I talked to him, if we were standing on one side of the room and I started talking, I would find he would back up. And by the time our conversation was over, we were on the other side of the room.

Meghan: What?

Melody: So he was literally like backing up away from me throughout..

Meghan: What?!

Melody: Yes, he would back up and then, you know, it's like...

Meghan: Physically? Physically backing up?

Melody: Physically backing up. Physically back up.

Meghan: Okay...

Melody: And it was like, curious to me. I was like, this is the craziest thing. I feel like, it's like I'm shouting at him or my hair is on fire. He's like backing up. He's, he's physically showing me how uncomfortable he is. So I get to New York one day and I'm checking into a hotel and he's in the lobby.

Meghan: Okay?

Melody: And I'm like, I'm going to try something different. So we see each other. He says hello. And I start whispering and I'm like, "Hi, how are you? So good to see you." And so he like, leans in and I'm like, he's like, "How long you're in town?" I'm like, "Oh, I'm just here for a couple of days. I just got some work to do." And so he's sitting there, you know, he leans over a little more. He's like, "Melody, sit with me." The mere fact that he said, "sit with me," that was huge!

Meghan: As opposed, as opposed to backing up.

Melody: He's like, "Melody, sit with me." And I was like, wow, just my tone... I'm still me. I'm still. But it was like, I just whispered. I just tried it. I was like, I just want to see is there another approach for this person? Because this person, I could learn a lot from - a lot! And I would like to be able to have a real conversation with them, but they just couldn't do it in my full self.

Meghan: But also your full self is not loud, aggressive, abrasive. It's none of those things! It's perfectly professional, classy, gracious, I mean all of that. So it's just the persona or the idea of it by standing in your authority... can somehow feel uncomfortable or threatening to people to the point that I think as women, we find these ways to... I don't know, show up, as you say, in a different way. Like by whispering almost, brings them in. Or even on, you know, I had the Angry Black Woman episode with Issa Rae and she talked about how she uses question qualifiers... like what she's saying isn't good enough so she has, offer a plan B, a different option, and I do the same thing sometimes with my intonation going up on a statement as though it's a question... these things that, I don't know, do you find... Do you find that you fall into traps or patterns of behavior like that as well?

Melody: Well, it's interesting, I have a whole theory around questions. So questions are non-threatening. Statements are very threatening to most people. And so I actually have a whole process when I'm going to a board meeting. I work to think of really original questions before I get there, because I find a lot of people try to hear themselves talk, so they try to show how smart they are, and they do that through statements. But I have actually found it's received better. And you're actually... it's more interesting when you ask a really great question. You know, it's never the first question. It's the follow up. So you've got to be ready for that because what you're trying to do is you're trying to steer someone where you want them without telling them. And maybe it's my packaging. I don't know. It's more effective. And so I, you know, most of the time, people, their eyebrows go up like, well, that's a really good question. As opposed to she put me on the spot and dressed me down over this issue.

Meghan: Mm. And do you think obviously that's such a testament of your temperament and your personality type and your self-awareness. Do you think that men have to think in those terms as well?

Mellody: I don't think I have to. I choose to. So -

Meghan: You choose to. Yeah, it's true.

Mellody: I think that um, no, I think that it, it comes across very differently.

Meghan: Yeah.

Mellody: Because it's, it's not unexpected and it's not considered an attack.

Meghan: Mm hmm.

Mellody: You know, there's just a different tolerance for that.

Meghan: Yeah. And for a man in a position of power, I think it's just, frankly, it's accepted and glorified and...

Mellody: Expected.

Meghan: Expected. Yeah, it's expected for him to have a strong point of view and to come in with strong statements and it's not questioned that it would be any other way.

Mellody: I want, I want to be clear about something, Meghan, though. Like anyone who's worked with me, anyone who knows me, I am not a shrinking violet like I have strong opinions about things. That's actually part of what I have to sometimes overcome because I can come in so hot. Not hot mad. But like, you know, a heat seeking missile on an issue. Right. And then that stifles all of the conversation. So I'm aware of that aspect of myself. I had one person once tell me they were like, you know, you're very intimidating. And I said, Well, you choose to be intimidated by me. I'm not. I literally said to him, I said, That's you, not me.

MUSIC IN

That's such a good reminder - that oftentimes, other people's behavior or reactions, they say so much more about that person than they do about you.

And also, Mellody and I were just about this idea of curiosity – the questions that we ask – and it made me think of that old adage, do you remember, the one... curiosity killed the cat. And I remember when I was younger, someone extended it and said to me, curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought her back.

After the break, an incredible story. I'm talking to my friend, makeup mogul turned medical advocate Victoria Jackson... whose tenacity in the face of adversity is honestly, stunning.

Victoria: I mean, it, it brings you to your knees and you lay down and you cry, and then you pick yourself up and you think, what can I do?

That's coming up, and I promise you this is a conversation that you just don't want to miss. Right after the break.

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ACT 2

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Producer: Hi, there. Before we continue, we wanted to let you know that there's some sensitive material coming up in this part of the episode -- specifically a story about sexual assault. Please listen with care.

Meghan: Welcome back.

So we've been exploring what it means for women to ask for what they need; to stand in their power – and also the kinds of labels, like “difficult” or “pushy” or the b-word – that often follow along on that behavior.

And I've made it known – my deep dislike for these labels, especially the last one. However, there is maybe *one* instance where the use of the “b-word” seems to, I guess, be acceptable. You're thinking, what are you talking about? You've been saying it should never be used. Yes, I'm talking about when it's referring to a female dog.

But *why* are female dogs called by *that* name? I knew there had to be more to the story and as I shared with you at the beginning of this episode, I love etymology. And what we found... is that apparently, it goes back to ancient Greece, and the goddess, Artemis, who was the goddess of the hunt. She used to travel with a pack of...dogs. And she was seen as free... bold... wild, beautiful... and from there, well, to track the rest of the history of this word... we called up journalist and author, Allison Yarrow.

Allison: Etymologists believe that the word bitch kind of came out of this Greek insult that meant women were dogs in heat begging for men. That was the idea. And there was a more modern definition that was written down in the 1890's and it was, bitch was an appellation that was the worst name you could call an English woman, even worse than a whore. So it was sort of codified as this way of degrading women by saying that they were hypersexual. But also, it sort of took away this idea that they were goddesses. So it took away this sort of divine power and replaced it with a degrading kind of sexuality.

Allison wrote a book called – again, my edit on the word here – “90s B-i-t-c-h: Media, Culture, and the Failed Promise of Gender Equality.” And in it, she points towards the 90s as a time when a new sort of woman was emerging in the U-S... A more *modern* woman, if you will...

Allison: The median age of marriage had hovered around 21 or 22 for about 100 years. And by the middle of the nineties, it had risen to 24 and then 25 by the end of the

decade. So many women were earning college degrees. Many more were going to college than men and then than ever before, and they were entering the workforce. The punishment for women earning more degrees, entering the workforce, delaying marriage and having children was sort of a mass campaign of what I call *bitchification*. So whenever women showed up in public, in headlines, they were discredited as different kinds of bitches.

And, as fate would have it, women were showing up in headlines, and in the news, a lot more during this time. Because this era of mass *b-word-ification* lined up, quite tellingly, with the invention of the 24-hour news cycle. And it was unsparing...

Allison: Every woman, whether she was in politics or Hollywood or sports, she was bitchified by the 24 hour news cycle. So early in the decade, you saw, you know, Anita Hill...

CLIP: *Anita Hill was less charitable – describing in almost emotionless terms Thomas’ relentless pursuit of her for dates at the Department of Education...*

Allison: Followed by the Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan scandal. After that, there were women like Courtney Love and Fiona Apple and Paula Cole and TLC. And Monica Lewinsky at the close of the decade. Really, name a woman during that decade. The treatment of them used various archetypes, derivatives, corollaries and actually the word bitch to, you know, sort of undercut their personas and to to bitchify them.

MRS. GINGRICH ON HILLARY CLIP: *And I can’t tell you what he said about Hillary. Why don’t you just whisper it to me - just between you and me? She’s a bitch.*

And you can be sure, as we moved into the new millennium and beyond, this sort of name calling, oh it didn’t stop...

CLIP:

Andy: Charlie, Derek M. emailed me and wants to know if you ever mended things with Rihanna? You got in a little twitter feud with her.

Charlie: Oh, that bitch, umm...

Crowd: Oh...

AOC: And in front of reporters, Representative Yoho called me, and I quote, “a f***** bitch.” These are the words that Representative Yoho levied against a *Congresswoman*.

MUSIC IN

All of this publicity, this demonization of these women... of course, it had ripple effects...

Allison: All of these interpretations of these various famous women have very real impacts for real women and girls, because women and girls saw these stories unfold. And at the time, we really weren't having a mainstream conversation about how sexist and racist the coverage of these women was. We were just sort of internalizing these images of women being incompetent, being unfeminine, being hypersexual as truth. And so that really impacted what we perceived as being possible for our own lives.

MUSIC OUT

Meghan: So what I'm thinking about, I mean, maybe that's part of why I have such a visceral reaction to this word. Because, it was kind of implanted on a granular level without any of us thinking about it at the time. And so these stereotypes that were lurking beneath the surface of these characterizations, they just became ingrained in us without any real understanding. Because these were complex women, with a range of life experiences – and nearly all of whom wielded some kind of power... and attempted to, in some ways, challenge the social order. A lot of times they did that in rooms full of powerful men, where a lot of people, they just didn't think they belonged there.

This is similar to what Melody Hobson has spoken about, and experienced... and also, my next guest – my dear friend, Victoria Jackson.

Victoria: I'm Victoria Jackson, sometimes confused with Victoria Jackson from Saturday Night Live, but I'm a very different – and with no disparaging the other Victoria Jackson – I'm a very different Victoria Jackson. And um I think of myself as really, like, a worrier to a warrior.

Meghan: I love that so much. From worrier to warrior. Now, for those of you who may not be familiar with *this* Victoria Jackson... let me tell you a little bit about her.

Victoria is a makeup artist, entrepreneur, and author... and that is, that is completely downplaying really everything that she's done. Because she got her start working as a makeup artist for movies and TV sets. And after about 13 years of that work, she wanted more... so in the 1980's, she started her own company: Victoria Jackson Cosmetics. You ever heard of "no-makeup makeup"? That's Victoria! And she turned this company into a massively profitable entity... I mean, we're talking more than 600 products. Over a *billion dollars* in sales! Just, it's incredible what she created.

And early on, she had this idea... to market directly to customers herself – on television. They were *infomercials*, and I remember them well. But it was new at the time – and you can imagine... as a woman introducing something like this, she faced some serious pushback. She's gonna tell you about it.

Victoria: I mean, it's really at times it's just relentless of how many times you're going to hear no. And the people that are going to say, you know, in my case, it was like, what are you going to do? Create a cosmetic company that's going to create with, you know, the

Lancome's and the Revlon's and all the big companies that are out there. And I was always in the beginning, especially with my infomercial, I was pitching to a group of men and men that were really at the time, infomercials were new, and nobody was selling products through television. And they were more, you know, like women need to see them and touch them and feel them and nobody's going to do this. And I really knew that there was a way.

She *finally* convinced the men in the room that doing an infomercial was a smart idea. But when it came time to actually shoot the infomercial... well, she faced a different sort of pushback.

Victoria: When you're really making that transition, as I was from makeup artist, you know, 13 years working on every major celebrity at the time and magazine covers and album covers, you're behind the scenes. And, you know, I would show up to my jobs, I wasn't wearing makeup. And it was really all about the people that you're working on. And all of a sudden, now I'm going to be launching my first cosmetic line on television. And it's really like, what is the CEO of a cosmetic company going to look like? And, you know, how do I talk and how do I present myself? And I was very, very insecure. And people knew for the first day of the shoot I was going to be very nervous. And um, I go in and I meet everybody, and I'm saying hello to everybody. And they introduced me to this cinematographer who is going to be doing the filming that day, and we were shooting in film. And he says hello. And he looks at me and he goes, "you know, Victoria, I have photographed some of the most beautiful women in the world and there are women with great beauty and there are women with great brains. And you are a woman with great brains." I was like...

[37:00] M: This is the worst story!

Victoria: Oh my gosh, and I was like, and there's all these people standing around me and...

M: People are hearing this.

Victoria: And they're all hearing it. And I'm just like, gulp.

M: I mean, you must have turtled. What was happening for you internally in that moment?

Victoria: I just sort of went, Wow. Hmm. In my mind, I'm thinking, did he just call me a dog? Am I, am I an attractive I mean, what? And I just looked at him and I, it sort of broke everything for me in actually almost the best way because my worst fears were just, okay, we just laid it all out and I just said, You know what? But I know you're going to make me look great. And I'm just so excited to start this day. And I just, I took that moment and it was sort of like, screw it, man, I am just going to go out there and do the best I can, because I knew if I made that infomercial work, if I could show them what I could do, it was going to change the rest of my life.

Meghan: Sure enough, it did. Starting in the late 80s, Victoria's makeup became the first ever cosmetics line marketed on television...

FADE IN / FADE OUT ARCHIVAL

Meghan: And people also *loved* her products! Victoria's infomercials ended up running for 10 years on QVC and generating, as I mentioned before, but let's just say it again – a whopping billion dollars in sales. All from this small idea that turned into a huge empire.

Now when you consider this kind of success in the face of what you're about to hear - well, it gets a whole lot more impressive. Because Victoria's upbringing, it was not an easy one. And in her adolescence, she suffered a horrific and traumatic experience. And just a heads up, what we're about to hear, this could be upsetting for some listeners.

Victoria: I mean I grew up in a broken home, which I know can, you know, not be that uncommon these days, but nonetheless painful. And I was born early. I came into the world at like six and a half months. So I always say I was born early to start worrying early and, you know, have the anxiety that I've really carried all of my life, and always being really fearful.

And, you know, I had a mom and dad that at the time, I think they were struggling. They were really young. They were figuring it out. You know, my parents didn't, they didn't find their way with each other. And um, my mother, when she remarried, she remarried a who was lovely. But he had three children and there was just a lot of chaos. And all of a sudden there's this sort of blended family and, you know, not very much money.

... and always feeling again that sense of not feeling safe that when I was 17... I, one night, was in my room. And I was sitting there and I had just, you know, gotten home. And I'm like you know, getting ready to go to sleep. And it's that horrible scene where, I have a mirror. It's a very small room. And I look in the mirror and standing right behind me is somebody with a ski mask on and it looks like a dish towel hanging over what I didn't know was ultimately, was a knife. And I'm thinking it was my brother. And I turn around and I go, Marc! And it is not. It's somebody who says, don't move in a way that I knew was not my brother. And um, I can basically tell you that what I learned and I was raped and I was stabbed and it was by the Pillowcase Rapist who was notorious, if you can believe there has actually been two pillowcase rapists. This is the Pillowcase Rapist in the seventies, the early seventies. And during what was this horrible event I learned at that moment how to disassociate. I sort of floated above my body and in my mind, I knew very clearly that no matter what was happening, I kept thinking, I'm not ready. It's not my time. Like this isn't my time, so I'm here for a reason.

BEAT

Meghan: That reason came into crisp focus for Victoria many years later. It was a moment when Victoria would take all of that success and profit from her cosmetics company – and that

spirit of perseverance she had honed throughout her life – and put it into the biggest challenge of all... the fight for her daughter's life.

Victoria: It's sort of like every parent's worst nightmare. All of a sudden, you know, you have a child who hasn't even been sick. And, you know, one day we're, we're out and about. And she starts telling me she has an eyeball headache and she's starting to lose some vision. And I just think she has an eye infection and, you know, oh, you know, we'll go to the eye doctor tomorrow here, take a Tylenol. You'll be okay.

And um, that kind of very long, horrible week went from finding out that it wasn't an eye infection, but an optic neuritis, which was an inflammation of her optic nerve. And going to see neurologists and finding out after a blood test for what would be a rare disease that she ultimately has. And it's, used to be known as Devic's disease, Neuromyelitis Optica, most people misdiagnosed with MS that have this, and they tell me that she has four years to live.

Meghan: I can't even imagine. As a mom, hearing that your daughter has four years to live. And her daughter – Ali – was only 13 at the time of her diagnosis. And the disease – Neuromyelitis Optica – or NMO... as it's often referred to... it's an autoimmune disease that affects the nervous system. And it can cause eye pain and vision loss... as well as weakness, numbness or paralysis in the arms and legs.

So in 2008, Victoria and her husband, Bill Guthy, started the Guthy-Jackson Charitable Foundation – in hopes of finding a cure for Ali's disease.

Victoria: Immediately, in that moment, my life changed and I went, as I say, from mascara to medicine. And I got myself to the Mayo Clinic. And I met the only doctor at the time who was doing any research, which they said was this very rare disease. So anyway, he was doing some research and I said, Hey, you don't know me, but I've sold a lot of cosmetics and hey, I make lip gloss, right? I can cure this. We're going to work together. And I know he looked at me like. Mm hmm. Yeah, sure.

Meghan: I mean, most people, I imagine, they would go, what are you talking about?

Victoria: Exactly. I was always used to people telling me why things weren't going to work. And having always had to sort of make my pitch and stand in front of, you know, the guys and tell them what I could do here I was again making my pitch now, but like I was sort of like, think about the sands of time and the hourglass were running out. You know, a mom who's got four years with their kids? It's like, oh, no, no, no, no, no. We're, we're going to do this. I'm going to find a way and we're going to cure this disease, knowing how am I doing that? I, you know, I didn't go to college. I didn't finish high school. So I decided to go to Stanford and start working with an amazing group of advisors, scientists, researchers, clinicians, and started to learn about, you know, molecular medicine and biology.

Meghan: From mascara to molecular immunology.

Victoria: Exactly, right. It makes sense, we can do it.

Meghan: Just casual. But when you, as a mom, you go, I will do anything.

Victoria: Yeah. I mean, it, it brings you to your knees and you lay down and you cry, and then you pick yourself up and you think, What can I do?

Meghan: You do everything.

Victoria: You do everything and anything. And you just start where you are.

MUSIC IN

Meghan: And that's exactly what she did. Because the disease was so rare at the time of her daughter's diagnosis, Victoria, she and her team of researchers, they actually had to create an entire bio repository to collect blood samples, tissues and any other necessary material. She started working with 200 researchers and scientists across 32 countries... and over time, Victoria invested \$70 million dollars of her *own* self-earned money into finding a cure for the disease.

MUSIC OUT

Meghan: There had to have been push back. There had to have been people just saying, stop, this is ridiculous. What are you doing?

Victoria: I mean, absolutely. People thinking, you know, maybe you should just write the checks and, and let us take, take it from here. You don't have to be as involved. And I was like, no, I'm going to understand this condition. I'm going to, I'm going to involve everything from patients to the pharmaceutical companies. I'm going to build bridges. And when I learned early on that I was going to have to build, can you imagine having to build a blood bank, a bio repository?

Meghan: No.

Victoria: I had no idea. I knew how to build, like an inventory of, like, blushes and not blood.

Meghan: Do you think the pushback you were getting was – could be twofold. Is it because you were a woman and out of your wheelhouse specifically, or perhaps because as the mom, they didn't want the emotion in it?

Victoria: I think it was all of that. I think, you know, you know, clearly it was sort of quote unquote messy for some people.

Meghan: How is it messy for some people?

Victoria: I mean, you know, I think because it is emotional, you know, and, you know, they're not always used to having more of an emotional woman who's also a smart woman and a businesswoman and a woman that's going to get things done, kind of bring all of that to the table.

Meghan: Yeah. And you're pushing and pushing...

Victoria: Pushing and but, yet you can't push too hard and you need to find a way to build that bridge. And, I mean, it was, it was literally momentous. And all I would visualize is like, I'm pushing this giant boulder up this hill, and there's a lot of people in wheelchairs. And, you know, we're all together pushing this up.

Meghan: Well, and I think, too, it's so interesting because really that image of you pushing this boulder up a hill in both of these veins of where you worked – And it's almost like Sisyphus pushing this boulder up and then it rolls back down, you push it up and it rolls back down, but you kept pushing it up. I wonder, though, as a woman, the more you're pushing, were you called difficult? Were they saying like, enough already, just stop. And with the medical industry the same, or did you find that in both of these fights that you were pushing towards that the feedback was different?

Victoria: I think there's a point, there's a crossover where all of a sudden difficult and ambitious and all these things. And maybe it's also because, you know, there was this effect of me of people are still seeing me as a mom, really trying to do a good thing and saving people's lives that maybe they cut me a little bit more slack, you know, but where there's a little bit of that crossover to respect. And I think people knew because I respected them. And, you know, it's not always about I'm going to win that popularity contest, and I just have to make decisions that at times are going to be unpleasant or somebody is not going to like.

MUSIC IN

Victoria: And I found that so for some people, because especially where I think people found me to be a little more, if they would label me difficult or ambitious was, I was rewriting a blueprint of how we think about curing disease, making people work together. And I think that's where it became a little bit harder because I was really pushing back and I was really fighting for a new way of thinking about how we published together in Medicine and how we work together and collaborate. Because it was my money, I could say, Here's the deal. I'm rewriting the, uh, the book on this, the terms of engagement here. Everybody has to collaborate and work together and talk about what worked, what didn't, worked, published together. And if they didn't, I wasn't writing those checks to them.

MUSIC OUT

Meghan: I mean, it's an incredible power position to be in. But you also just had, just such clarity on what you've done, which is why, Ali, is how old now?

Victoria: Ali is 29. I mean, she's really my hero. And, you know...

Meghan: She's incredible.

Victoria: She's incredible.

Meghan: And it was at 13 that they said only four years to live.

Victoria: Exactly.

Meghan: And she's now 29.

Victoria: She's 29...

Meghan: Though there is still no cure for NMO, Victoria's tireless work connecting a community of scientists has led to the creation of three therapeutics that have now been approved by the FDA. This is a phenomenal feat. Not just for her own daughter's health, but for so many affected by autoimmune diseases around the world.

And Victoria's work in both the makeup and medical fields... they've been recognized internationally. In 2017... she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame by none other than feminist leader and journalist Gloria Steinem...

***CLIP:** For your rare and inspirational activism on behalf of women's health and entrepreneurship, and your transformative work in medical research, Victoria Jackson you are now inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame. *Cheers**

And just a year later, the Vatican awarded Victoria with the Pontifical Key Advocacy Award... and she received it from none other than the Pope himself. The Pope!

Meghan: Look, what you ended up creating when you say you created three drugs is all part of getting that blood bank together, getting the right doctors. You know, everything that you've done now. Being honored by the pope for what you've done in this vein. And, you know, the Women's Hall of Fame, your work on both of these fields has been tremendous. The impact that you've made has been tremendous. And where does that will come from? Yes you heard that inner voice but for so many young women who are listening and older women who are listening, some days it feels hard to just get out of bed.

Victoria: Yeah, listen, there's plenty of times when, you know, you're dealing with those really hard moments and there's times even today in the work that I do, you know, you go home and you lay down or you have to get down on the floor and cry and, you know, figure it all out. But you know, it's really surrounding yourself with people that are, you know, along the way that will help and support you. I mean, I always say worry weighs

more, you know, when you carry it alone. So, you know, I've tried to figure out if I can't solve it, you know, like going in the front door, then I'm going to come up through the floor or in the window or down from the ceiling or like I'm always thinking of how do I get to where I want to go? And I'm just that's, that's just my nature. I mean, I am just relentless and truly have become masterful, good or bad, of just going back and just trying to figure the way and digging deep. And you know, I even say to my kids, it's just one little bit of sage advice that I've always said – they, they don't necessarily think it's so sage, but I think it's been good – but I would always say things to them as they're going through their careers. You know, like if you're not in the room, you're not in the room. And they're like, oh, great, mom. Yeah, like, what does that mean? And it's like, if you're not in the room and making your voice heard or fighting for what you believe in or just showing up, you're not in the room. And we all know, like, nothing. You know nothing nets zero – nothing. And um I'm, I really am grateful for probably all the people that did tell me I was too ambitious or, you know, difficult because it just reinforced that part of me that there's a way to get where you want to go and you can do it however you need to do that. Being still kind to people, still being strong, still knowing at times you're not going to win that personality contest.

MUSIC IN

Meghan: And that rings so true. Because if you look at this word “difficult” – it comes up for a *lot* of women in work and in life. I mean, I was just chatting with my girlfriends recently and I was asking them, for the show, what are the sort of archetypes you think we should discuss? And almost immediately, unequivocally – they all jumped to “difficult” – that’s the word! You have to talk about difficult!, they said. It gets thrown around so casually now. And as a woman... my friend said to me... there’s a certain point when you come to terms with the fact that not everyone's going to like you. The goal can't be for everyone to like you, but the goal can be for them to respect you.

MUSIC OUT

Meghan: Before I let Victoria go, after all of this incredible advice and frankly, really inspiring stories – I had to ask her the same thing I've asked all of my guests who've joined me – for her Three Words...

BEAT

Meghan: Because we get to now label and describe ourselves – what are the three words that you would use to describe yourself as a young girl?

Victoria: As a young girl?

Meghan: Yeah.

Victoria: Um, a survivor. Um... fearful. And lost.

Meghan: And today?

Victoria: A survivor, a thriver. Fearless and found.

Meghan: I love all of those! And even if you are still a worrier sometimes, you are certainly a warrior. My gosh. I want the world to hear the *you* that I know so well so I'm just really grateful.

Victoria: Thank you. I'm so grateful.

Meghan: Yay! Thank you for doing that for all of us, for so many of us.

Victoria: Thank you.

Meghan: And of course, this episode wouldn't be complete without hearing from Mellody one last time – for *her* Three Words...

[55:17] Mellody: Anxious. Ambitious. And resilient.

Meghan: And three words to describe yourself now?

Mellody: Anxious, ambitious, and resilient.

Meghan: Resilient! *laughs*

Mellody: I've tried to take the anxious one down.

Meghan: And consistent.

Mellody: That's the one, I should dial down the anxiety because, you know, I think I'll be fine.

Meghan: Yes, I think you'll be just fine. And look, that is the way of the world right now. There's a lot to feel anxious about but I think you've certainly got the tools to just get through it all so thank you so much. Honestly, I appreciate it.

Mellody: Thank you so much for having me. And thank you for all that you're doing to shine a light on these issues which are so critically important for our society.

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CLOSING THOUGHTS
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Meghan: Reframing. Reclaiming or simply relinquishing. That's the dance I feel we did this episode. You see, as we started that, for some women, it's all about embracing and reclaiming the B word, taking the power out of it, maybe even using comedy to diffuse it.

And for others, it's standing in their knowing and being unaffected by the implication of the word or its cousin – difficult. Powering through in spite of the pain or even the insecurity it may cause, and sometimes using the dig for drive. Getting them closer to their goal. In building a business, a career or as is the case with both Victoria and Melody, building a legacy with focus, comfortable in their directness, with confidence and with kindness.

I remember when I was a kid and people would say Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names will never hurt you. Well, that was just a flat out lie. Of course, names hurt. But what happens when we use that pain to fuel purpose? When the B-word is shouted with one intent, but you're able to let it go. And to remind yourself of all the other words with a B that better describe you. Beautiful. Blessed. Brilliant. Beguiling. Blissful. Bedazzling. Take your pick. Be that person.

As ever. I'm Meghan and I look forward to spending time with you again next week.

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CREDITS
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