

Would you  
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a badass?

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Activist MALALA YOUSAFZAI  
leads 2022's Badass 50

by CHARLOTTE COLLINS, SARAH CRISTOBAL, JENNIFER FERRISE,  
SYDNEY HAYMOND, and SAMANTHA SIMON





Yousafzai during the filming of her MasterClass course in 2021.

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# Malala Yousafzai

The Nobel laureate is more than qualified to teach lessons on advocacy. Lucky for us, her class on creating change is now in session.

**How would you describe someone who is badass?** A person who knows their ambitions and aspirations and is confident in what they believe in. They're proud of themselves, their identity, where they come from, and what they stand for.

**Would you call yourself a badass?** The way I have defined it, I would say yes, of course.

**What issues are currently at the forefront for young women?** I think about the activism of women in Afghanistan right now. The Taliban is back in power, and women in the past 20 years have seen a very different life—they were able to enroll in schools and take jobs. Today they are protesting for those rights because they cannot imagine living the way they lived under the Taliban in 1996.

**With education being a cause so close to your heart, what did it feel like walking across the stage in a formal graduation ceremony in November?** It was a very special moment for me. Receiving my degree from Oxford is a dream come true. I stood up for education at age 11, when the Taliban was banning girls from going to school. I remember that day vividly when I could not go to school; I wanted to be in a classroom. Looking at my graduation pictures is a reminder that this might not have been possible if the Taliban had remained in [Pakistan's] Swat Valley, if people had not heard our voices. I may not have been able to reach this point.

**How has your activism championing education led you to work with MasterClass?** I started using MasterClass a few years ago, and I think it's not only bringing inspiring video lessons, it's also attempting to change how we see education,

which is oftentimes limited to schools. Don't leave that passion for learning behind you; we should always consider ourselves students. I've learned from my mentors and friends and from experiencing what activism is like through speaking for myself, and I was honored by the opportunity to share my advocacy journey.

**What encouraged you to speak out about your marriage and share your thoughts on the institution?** We know how marriage has been a patriarchal institution. Historically, it has not favored women. Even now, in communities around the world, it does not favor women. But if you find a best friend in life and that person loves you and understands your concerns, you can start a journey together and help each other through. Marriage is a social construct, so if we created it, we can change it. We can make it inclusive, feminist, and equal for everybody.

**We loved seeing you included in HBO Max's Friends reunion! What are some of your favorite TV shows to binge-watch?** Ooh, I love *Ted Lasso*! I also really enjoyed *Sex Education*. I recently watched *Zoolander 2* and they mentioned my name, which I didn't know about, so that was quite interesting to see.

**Looking ahead, what are you ambitious for?** I'm starting a production company, so I'm really excited for that. I can produce content that brings new perspectives, especially from young women and women of color. I'm passionate about engaging girls in conversations about equality and climate change. It's inspiring to see young women share their stories. —CHARLOTTE COLLINS



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## Julie Rikelman

Rikelman considers her most gutsy qualities to be integrity, courage, and tenacity, all of which have served her well in her role as senior litigation director for the Center for Reproductive Rights. In 2020, she successfully argued before the U.S. Supreme Court to preserve access to abortion in Louisiana, but the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the subsequent appointment of Justice Amy Coney Barrett left the fate of *Roe v. Wade* uncertain. Rikelman once again argued before the court in December of last year with *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, concerning a Mississippi abortion ban after 15 weeks that, if upheld, would effectively overturn *Roe v. Wade*. "It's critical for people to be able to make these kinds of personal choices about their bodies, lives, and health for themselves," says Rikelman. "As a mom, I know pregnancy has unique demands and life-altering consequences for families. It's not the type of decision that the government should make for us."



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## Elizabeth Gore & Carolyn Rodz

"Every woman with an entrepreneurial spirit should have the opportunity to start her own company," says Gore, who, alongside Rodz, co-founded Hello Alice, a free platform that helps small businesses launch and grow. When the pandemic hit, they shifted their efforts to support nearly 500,000 entrepreneurs—many of whom are women, people of color, veterans, and from the LGBTQ+ community—with access to vital capital, resources, and networks. "We raised \$20 million in small grants to help entrepreneurs survive this difficult time," adds Rodz. "We're proud to rally and help save so many incredible businesses along the way."



Butler posing in front of her Dahomey Amazon portrait.

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## Bisa Butler

"I decided to become a professional quilter 20 years ago when that was not considered a serious art medium, but I knew it was right for me," says Butler, whose vivid quilted portraits of African Americans depict revered historical figures, contemporary icons, and everyday people. Her work has been featured everywhere from magazines and book covers to the Art Institute of Chicago, where her first solo museum exhibition was showcased in 2021. "I work my butt off to make sure my art represents myself and my people strongly," she says. "I think that makes me a badass."

## Oksana Masters

With only six months between the closing ceremonies of the Summer 2021 Tokyo games and the opening of the Winter 2022 Beijing games, the rower, cross-country skier, and 10-time Paralympic medal winner is pushing her body to the limit to appear on the U.S. cross-country skiing team once again. Even with four gold medals under her belt, Masters's journey has been far from golden. Both of her legs were damaged in utero by radiation poisoning from the Chernobyl nuclear reactor incident, and after being adopted from a Ukrainian orphanage at a young age, Masters had to fight to earn her spot on the team. "I missed out on making the team for Beijing 2008, and one of the coaches told me I'd never make it as an athlete," she says. "I just think it would be incredible to have a lights-out run this time around."



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## 6 Mickey Guyton

After years of trying to make it as a Black artist in country music, Guyton broke through with her studio debut, *Remember Her Name*. She's used her voice to speak out on racism both on and off the album, including calling out the use of slurs in the genre and celebrating Black beauty with songs like "Love My Hair." "I spoke my truth in the hopes that it would bring awareness to the things I was dealing with," she says. "There were concerns about backlash, and I sure got a lot of it, but I had nothing to lose. Now I've started seeing change in country music, and it's a beautiful thing."



# Candace Parker

“I think winning an Olympic gold medal and MVP in the same season I was pregnant with my daughter is pretty badass,” says the Chicago Sky forward/center, who made headlines when she brought home a franchise-first WNBA title to her native Chicago last year. Parker also became the first woman on a cover of the popular video game series *NBA 2K* and serves as an onscreen analyst for the NBA. She embraces her position as a role model in women’s sports and hopes to empower young girls to speak their minds, often leading by example. “I’ll say the things that other people think but don’t want to say,” she says. “It’s gotten me in some trouble, but I think it has also started conversations that needed to be had.”



## 8 Silvia Vasquez-Lavado

Driven by her ambition to help sexual abuse survivors like herself heal, the mountaineer has built a community for women to process their experiences through adventures in nature with her nonprofit, Courageous Girls. “The strength of surrendering and existing in harmony is how I live with my trauma, with the knowledge that all storms eventually pass and what is left behind is beautiful,” she says. With the Seven Summits already crossed off her bucket list, she’s taking her career to new heights with the release of her memoir, *In the Shadow of the Mountain* (out this month), which is slated for a film adaptation produced by and starring Selena Gomez.



## 10 Tara Houska

As a tribal attorney, Houska is well versed in the language that dispossesses land and rights from people in favor of industrial growth. She brought that knowledge to the front lines while protesting the construction of Enbridge’s Line 3 oil pipeline in Minnesota, which led to her being shot with rubber bullets and arrested. “When we experience brutality while protesting, I think about how those brutalizing us are part of a machine that has convinced so many that the land defenders trying to protect nature with our physical bodies are criminals; that water, the lifeblood of every human on earth, is worth contaminating for oil and mining,” she says. “I pity those who harm us. We are trying to protect their children’s water too.”



## 9 Nikole Hannah-Jones

The most badass thing the Pulitzer Prize winner has ever done? “Creating the 1619 Project and rejecting UNC’s tenure offer, instead heading to Howard University with \$25 million in donations in order to start the Center for Journalism and Democracy.” The 2019 publication of her epic work of long-form journalism in *The New York Times* ignited a national dialogue. With two books published in November and a 1619 docuseries in the works at Hulu, Hannah-Jones sees abundant opportunities for 1619 to take different shapes as an ongoing educational project. “People are hungry for this information; they want to have a better understanding of their country and its most vexing problems,” she says. “The expansion across platforms is critical because it allows us to reach more people, and to provide some of the missing understandings that will hopefully move us to become a more just country.”

## Michelle Wu

Wu made history last year becoming the first woman and person of color to be elected as the mayor of Boston. In her rousing victory speech, the Harvard grad and daughter of Taiwanese immigrants laid out her progressive and inclusive vision for the future of the city, saying: “We are ready to meet this moment. We are ready to become a Boston for everyone. A Boston that doesn’t push people out, but welcomes all who call our city home.”



Haugen testifying before Congress in December 2021.

# 12 Frances Haugen

Releasing data on Facebook’s mishandling of issues such as hate speech and political ads made Haugen a target.

**What it was like to take the step to publicize Facebook’s internal documents?** You might think I would be nervous about things like testifying, but I don’t tend to be. What scared me was the possibility that I wouldn’t be able to finish my task. That somehow Facebook would become aware of what I was doing and shut it down, and make sure no one else succeeded. It was a race to the finish line, and the moment these documents were in Congress’s hands, I could breathe a sigh of relief. I’ve done the necessary thing. I firmly believe we can solve problems together, and now we as a society can help Facebook to change.

**You’ve been traveling internationally speaking to tech crowds and regulators.** From the moment the *60 Minutes* piece aired, the pace has been nonstop. It’s been incredible to speak with legislators around the world and go over the documents. The problems of Facebook and social media in general are going to be solved by many more people deeply understanding the issue and adding their voices to the mix to solve it. If I can be a conduit in making that happen, I will do it all day long.

**Who do you consider to be a badass?** My mom had me at a time when it wasn’t considered an acceptable choice for a tenure-track female professor to have children. She had to make extreme sacrifices and still went on to accomplish huge things in her academic career. I think the fact she followed her heart in her 50s to become a priest shows that real badasses aren’t defined by external rewards, but rather by setting the course they find fulfilling.

**What does “badass” mean to you?** Someone who does what they believe is right, even when it’s unpopular. A badass doesn’t shrink from powerful people.

**How do you relate to the term “whistleblower”?** I’m grateful that we have whistleblower laws, which are written to protect people who come forward. But I’m up against one of the largest companies in the world, and they have the resources to retaliate once the press dies down. No matter what, nothing they could take from me would make me regret speaking up for the millions affected in areas where Facebook is making conflict worse. —SARAH CRISTOBAL



## 13 JoAnne Bland

At age 11, Bland followed John Lewis and Hosea Williams up to the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday. Nearly six decades later, she’s preserving the legacy of the organizers who made Selma, Alabama, a battlefield in the fight for Black Americans’ right to vote through her tours of the area. The activist plans to build upon her work by creating a Foot Soldiers Park and Education Center on the ground where the Bloody Sunday march began. “My vision is to show every visitor, and especially every child, that they have the power to make change in their community,” says Bland. “It is my greatest hope that this city and this site are treasured and honored long after all of us, the original foot soldiers, have passed.”



## 14 Heather Hodge & Emily Kim

Hodge and Kim founded their social enterprise The Pastry Project with the goal of erasing barriers to entry in the world of baking by providing free culinary training for those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to pursue it. “Nothing is more rewarding to us than graduating our students and helping place them in great jobs,” says Hodge. The pair didn’t always have a recipe for success; instead they let their drive to uplift others become their guiding force. “Our mission came first, and ways to fund it came second,” says Kim. “We’ve had to be flexible, scrappy, and innovative with our revenue streams to pay for training and running the business. We didn’t know what to expect, but we took the risk and it’s working!”

# 15 Bobbi Brown

“Having been in the industry for over four decades, I can tell you that the single best beauty product in the world is happiness,” says the cosmetics titan. After selling her namesake label 25 years ago and being bound by a noncompete, Brown launched her new clean-beauty brand, Jones Road, the day after the clause expired, with the goal of making her new endeavor just as iconic and beloved as the last. “When I was coming up in the industry, you would never publicly help a competitor or share your trade secrets,” she says. “Now there’s a wonderful camaraderie among female founders in the industry. I mentor them, but they also mentor me.”



# Claudette Colvin

The civil rights pioneer started her fight as a teenager in Montgomery, Alabama. Over 60 years later, she moved to clear a Jim Crow-era conviction from her record.

In 1955, 15-year-old Colvin refused to give up her seat to a white woman on a segregated bus. She resisted the officer during her arrest, defying a rule she knew was unjust. Though her courageous act came nine months before Rosa Parks would be elevated as a leader in the Civil Rights Movement for doing the same thing, Colvin was not championed by prominent Black organizers at the time; they instead decided to rally behind Parks, who was considered a more palatable figure than Colvin. “The leaders chose Mrs. Parks because she had been through nonviolence training and would be more acceptable,” says Colvin. “I didn’t hold any animosity because they did what was best for the movement. It was not about one person; it was about moving our people forward.” Colvin’s brave deed resulted in her obtaining a criminal record, and over half a century later, the charge of assaulting an officer during her arrest remained. She was placed on probation and never received notice that her term was complete. In October 2021 her attorney filed an expungement request, signifying that the charges against her were never right. “Clearing my name doesn’t mean anything to me now and doesn’t benefit me at all,” says Colvin. “But it does let my grandchildren and great-grandchildren know that I didn’t do anything wrong. All I did was sit down for my rights so that they could stand up for theirs.”

Having amassed a wealth of knowledge on advocacy from her own experiences, she encourages today’s activists to remember that when it comes to seeking justice, there is no easy way to achieve large-scale progress. “You can’t sugarcoat it,” says Colvin. “You have to take a stand and say, ‘This is not right.’” And if she could share a few words of wisdom with her younger self? “I would like to tell my 15-year-old self that it wasn’t fair what happened, and you didn’t know it then, but your decisions would change the world.” —CHARLOTTE COLLINS



# 17 Raeshem Nijhon

“There’s a history of allowing exclusionary elitism to persist for the sake of the box office, so I built a space where we demand creative excellence, but the end does not justify the means,” says Nijhon. In 2018 she created Culture House, a Black-, brown-, and women-owned production company that develops diverse stories at the intersection of pop culture and politics. This year it will release projects on Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, and OWN, including a docuseries about the culture of Black hair called *The Hair Tales*, executive-produced by Oprah Winfrey and Tracee Ellis Ross.



# 18 Jane Gilbert

In April 2021 Gilbert was named the world’s first official heat officer, tasked with protecting the lives and livelihoods threatened by the worsening effects of climate change in Florida’s Miami-Dade County. She addresses the inequities in how residents experience rising temperatures, making sure the local government is progressing in its preparedness for increased heat through public outreach and investments in safer housing and cooler neighborhoods. “Climate change is the biggest challenge humanity has had to face, but it also presents us with the biggest opportunity to shift how we live, work, and play to ensure a more equitable and sustainable tomorrow,” says Gilbert. “I have two teenage children. I work to protect their generation’s future.”



# 19 Debbie Sledge

The founding member of Sister Sledge rose to fame alongside her siblings with the album *We Are Family* in 1979 and continues to celebrate her heritage today. “My grandmother Viola was a lyric soprano and a protégé of civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune,” she says. “She inspired us with stories of the experience under her tutelage.” Now Sledge has teamed up with the family’s next generation to release the song “Free,” their first as the rebranded group Sister Sledge ft. Sledgendary. “I’m proud to see our children step into this legacy grounded in the love, confidence, and encouragement of family.”

# Tunde Oyeneyin

When the pandemic forced many of us to work from home, a workout-from-home movement was also born, and no method was more sought after than Peloton. As one of the platform’s most popular instructors, Oyeneyin conducts confidence-boosting classes that have become an inspiration to people of all fitness levels by proving anyone can be an athlete. “I didn’t make the sports teams that I tried out for in my teenage years,” she says. “But today I feel incredibly connected with my tribe, and that sense of belonging holds me accountable every single day.” Now partnered with Nike and releasing a book this summer, Oyeneyin

hopes to “create a more inclusive community for sport and invite more women and young girls into the space.”



# 21 Liz Shuler

“We are building pathways and support structures to grow a bold, inclusive, and transformative movement—I think that’s pretty badass,” says Shuler, the first woman elected president of the AFL-CIO in the labor federation’s history. She took the reins as leader of the organization’s 57 unions last August, in a year marked by a groundswell in union and strike organizing, from taxi cab drivers in New York City to Amazon workers in Bessemer, Alabama. “At this inflection point, we have unlimited potential to reimagine and rebuild a worker-centered democracy and economy.”



# 22 Maggie Grout

Being adopted from a rural village in China when she was 18 months old shaped how the social entrepreneur saw the world. Raised in Colorado, Grout attended CU Boulder’s Leeds School of Business and realized the importance of a proper education. Now she’s looking to pay it forward with her company, Thinking Huts, which builds schools in places like Madagascar using 3D technology. “3D printing can bridge the education gap by accelerating the construction of schools in partnership with communities where innovation is rarely seen,” says Grout, who plans to expand the program to Kenya and India.





# 23 Eliza Griswold

When the U.S. chaotically left Afghanistan in August, private citizens took up the slack. Using her vast media network, Griswold coordinated evacuations remotely. Here, she chats with fellow journalist JODI KANTOR about how she and her team got it done.

**JODI KANTOR:** You're a language person, so I'm going to ask you to sort of wrestle with this word "badass." What does it mean to you? Is it a word you use?

**ELIZA GRISWOLD:** It's not a word that I would use for myself. We might hit a cultural moment when we think it's dated in some gendered way, but for now I think it's the best we can do, and sometimes that's what we use language for. I'm freaking honored to be considered one.

**JK:** You were a part of the humanitarian effort helping those who were seeking evacuation from Afghanistan last summer after the fall of the government in Kabul to the Taliban. What did you end up doing?

**EG:** The Taliban took over more quickly than the U.S. had expected or was prepared for, due to a massive failure of intelligence and planning. There are people who were directly in harm's way because they were our allies. In that complete collapse, thousands of Americans—accountants, college professors, journalists—were flooded with



“ [Getting involved] did not feel like a choice at any point, because every single resource anybody could mobilize was necessary.”

—ELIZA GRISWOLD

WhatsApp messages from people we know who needed help. We began to do everything we could to organize private evacuations; nobody knew anything about how to run them, but my friend and colleague Dexter Filkins and I joined Ashley Bommer Singh and Vikram Singh, a husband-and-wife team that was organizing private evacuations through a plane-charter company.

**JK:** Where did you get the money?

**EG:** Everywhere and through myriad connections. I reached out to folks in the media, some I knew personally and some through mutual friends, and I told them we were raising money to fund evacuations. Within 10 minutes the women of Hollywood were in my email offering tens of thousands of dollars for these flights, and within days we had what we needed.

**JK:** So, it's summer, you've got an 8-year-old, you're sitting with your laptop and your phone, and you've got this river of panic, urgency, and

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# 24 Mimi G

As a young mother struggling with homelessness, Mimi G discovered sewing as a way to deal with her anxiety and to change her circumstances. In 2008 she decided to create Mimi G Style, a sewing how-to channel on YouTube, and has gathered over 300,000 subscribers. Now she wants to bring her knowledge directly to followers through her online school, Sew It! Academy. "I was a runaway, sexually abused as a child, a teen mom, a high school dropout, and a domestic abuse survivor who never had examples of entrepreneurs, but I knew I had a greater purpose and calling," she says. "Sewing was my therapy."



# 25 Lauren Ridloff

With her role as Makkari in Chloé Zhao's film *Eternals*, Ridloff became Marvel's first deaf superhero and an instant fan favorite. "Makkari happens to be deaf, which is just another part of her superhero suit," says Ridloff, who is also deaf. "The first time I saw myself onscreen as her, I felt the immediate impact of perceived imperfection being portrayed as a superhero trait." She hopes to see the entertainment industry promote more deaf stories by deaf writers that draw on the spectrum of experiences within the community. "I want to see more hard truths, more romance, and more comedy told from the gaze of someone who has been pushed out of the room for so long. Imagine how fresh things would be through a different lens!"

# Nicola Coughlan

The Irish actress currently stars in not one but two buzzy Netflix shows: *Bridgerton*, where she plays the often overlooked but secretly shrewd Penelope Featherington, and *Derry Girls*, as the feisty high schooler Clare Devlin. Though she admits it was hard at first to get her foot in the Hollywood door, the outcome has been well worth the wait. "A badass woman is unapologetic about her ambition," says Coughlan. "Ambition can be seen as a dirty word, but I have always known what I want and been unafraid to go out and get it."



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# 26 Lindsey Vonn

"If you tell me I can't do something, I'll work as hard as I can for as long as it takes to prove you wrong," says Vonn, the most decorated female skier of all time. "I've skied with a broken leg and duct-taped my hand to my pole when I had a sliced tendon in my thumb.

No matter how much pain I'm in, I always find a way." With the January release of her new memoir, *Rise* (inset), Vonn—who retired in 2019 and now serves as an adviser to several venture capital funds—is reflecting on her "very turbulent" journey. "I think that understanding my value as a person outside of skiing was my biggest obstacle after my professional career. It was a difficult transition, but I learned a lot of life lessons—and I hope to inspire others by sharing them."



# 28 Sydney Freeland

The Navajo filmmaker and director is bringing more Indigenous-led stories to TV platforms with her work on Peacock's *Rutherford Falls* and FX on Hulu's *Reservation Dogs*. "We had a lot of conversations about making the TV we wanted to see growing up because we had no representation outside of the wise sage or ruthless savages," says Freeland. "It's exciting that people can see authentic Native representation and have it be so well-received. The more marginalized and minority voices that can have a seat at the table in Hollywood, the more authentic the stories will be."

# 29 Luvvie Ajayi Jones

After her TED Talk, "Get Comfortable With Being Uncomfortable," racked up over 7.5 million views online and countless comments, the author, podcast host, and public speaker was inspired to write her latest book, *Professional Troublemaker: The Fear-Fighter Manual*, which quickly became a *New York Times* best seller. "It's my everlasting reminder to live boldly and audaciously in spite of all the reasons I might have to cower," she says. "To be a professional troublemaker is to be a badass—a disrupter for good."





# 30 Georgia Pritchett

When the British *Succession* writer and co-executive producer found herself unable to describe her fears, her therapist encouraged her to write them down. The result? *My Mess Is a Bit of a Life*, a book of essays that covers Pritchett's lifelong struggle with anxiety, her sons' autism diagnoses, and the sexism she's faced in entertainment. "Being a scriptwriter is a good job for an anxious person because you're literally putting words in other people's mouths," she says. "It's a very anonymous way to express yourself, and it's quite cathartic to put your darker stuff into a character like Roman Roy." Now Pritchett is voicing her own truth. "After a while you get tired of being resilient and thick-skinned."



# 31 Doralys Britto

With nearly 2 million subscribers on YouTube, Britto is bringing Afro-Latina culture to the forefront with her fun beauty and lifestyle videos. She uplifts followers by embracing all aspects of her culture, including her hair. "From an early age, we are taught that our curls are too distracting, that our braids are too unprofessional, or that our dreads are too dirty," she says. "Now I know that is not true, but it was a journey to get here. I love bringing light to a hairstyle that has been so stigmatized and judged over centuries. I want young girls to see me and know that dreads and curls are beautiful."



# 33 Tananarive Due

With films like Nia DaCosta's *Candyman* winning big at the box office and Jordan Peele's thrillers generating constant buzz, it's safe to say that the demand for Black horror is finally being met. But the genre's renaissance wouldn't be possible without Due, a leading scholar and author in the field. Her UCLA class on Black horror aesthetics is so essential that big names, including Peele, have been known to drop in. "I really feel like this movement can sustain because horror audiences are supportive," she says. "They understand the importance of theme and messaging and how powerful horror can be in conveying them. People are open to engaging with social horror more now."



# 32 Priyanka Jain & Laine Bruzek

"Our mission is to radically reinvent how we understand and treat the female body and inspire everyone to close the gender health gap for good," says Jain, one of the co-founders of the health company Evvy. "There is so much we still don't know about how to best care for women and people with vaginas." The idea for their at-home vaginal microbiome test was based on personal frustrations. In early meetings, Bruzek told "every venture capitalist and reporter in N.Y.C. about my chronic yeast infections. It's one thing to talk about destigmatizing vaginal health, but I'm proud that we've found ways to actually put that into practice and encouraged our community to share their stories too."

# 34 Maria Sharapova

"Winning Wimbledon as a teenager was an incredible breakthrough and one that opened many doors in my life," says the tennis superstar. Since retiring from the game in 2020, Sharapova has become a major player in finance. "I always made a point to take a seat at the table when it came to business decisions during my tennis career, which motivated me to get more involved in investing," she says. With an expansive investment profile already, Sharapova is determined to pass on her knowledge. She is partnering with Public.com to help student athletes, who are now eligible to receive endorsements while at school, make smart financial decisions.



# 35 Zaila Avant-garde

Guided by her love of learning and competing, the spelling bee champ and world-record-holding baller is Black excellence personified.



Avant-garde after winning the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Inset: Demonstrating her basketball skills.

In 2019 Avant-garde won the first spelling bee she entered. Two years later she would become the first African American to win the Scripps National Spelling Bee. "People say that I am a genius or something—and no, I am just a normal 15-year-old girl," she says. "You can do this; there's no special juice or something I have drunk." Since she was 5 years old, the main outlet for the polymath's competitive spirit has been basketball. She's a standout on the court and holds multiple Guinness World Records for her ball-handling skills. "I love the camaraderie and the competition," she says. A slew of celebrities and public figures have been in touch with her since taking home the Scripps title, including her personal hero, Malala Yousafzai, whose autobiography Avant-garde credits as a huge inspiration. With the spotlight has also come some criticism—she notes her natural hair as something haters like to pick at—but, seasoned competitor that she is, Avant-garde is virtually unflappable. "You wouldn't believe how many times I've been disparaged," she says. "Not letting anybody push me down because of something that I am, or letting anybody stand in my way, is my most badass quality." Not one to rest on her laurels, and driven by a zeal for education fostered through homeschooling, Avant-garde is in constant pursuit of her next lesson. "I'm learning Spanish, learning to play the piano, and learning to be a bit less shy; I feel like I need to work on being myself more," she says. "That's what I'm looking forward to in the near future." —CHARLOTTE COLLINS



# 36 Mako Komuro

Last fall, Komuro, formerly known as Princess Mako, abdicated her position as part of Japan's imperial family so that she could marry her college sweetheart, a lawyer named Kei Komuro. (According to Japanese law, she was required to forfeit her status upon marriage to a "commoner.") The two now reside in N.Y.C., where Mako, who was diagnosed with PTSD as a result of the situation, plans to find work. "Kei is indispensable to me," Komuro said at a press conference before they left Tokyo. "And for us, [marriage] is a necessary choice as we listen to and protect our hearts and feelings."

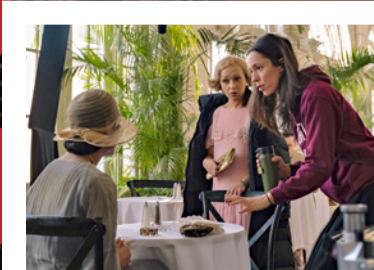


# 37 Akeelah Blu

"I feel the most badass when I am performing. It is my superpower," says the Selma, Alabama, native, who touched hearts when she appeared on the HBO reality series *We're Here*, which follows three drag queens as they travel to small towns to help locals on their drag journeys. She initially had reservations about appearing on the show, knowing that the increased visibility could make her a target. Looking back, she has no regrets. "My contribution matters. How I show up in the world and what I have to say when I arrive means something," says Blu. "My appearance on the show may have helped liberate a trans teen who doesn't have the freedom to live their life as their full true self, which was my experience at that age. I know that my gifts will not just make space for me but will help me make space for others."



Below: Hall directing Tessa Thompson and Ruth Negga in *Passing*.



# Rebecca Hall

The actress reflects on her creative influences and what inspired her to adapt Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* for her critically acclaimed directorial debut.

**How does the descriptor "badass" apply to you?** It's actually a term I'm not that comfortable with. I feel like it's become a kind of catchall for a pop feminism that celebrates many truly extraordinary things, like artistic achievement and political courage, alongside many things I think are broadly not that good for the world. But in its original sense, I take it to mean someone who does what they're driven to do in the face of any obstacle, without regard for the judgment of others, and I think that's worth living up to.

**Who are some women that you admire?** Nina Simone, Emily Dickinson, Lorraine Hansberry, Karen Dalton, Nella Larsen, my mother, my stepmother, my sisters, my friends, and most women I've ever met who are just plain existing in the world and doing what they want to be doing.

**You've spoken about your racial identity and how it relates to the concept of passing. [Hall's maternal grandfather was Black; he, as well as Hall's biracial mother, regularly "passed" as white.] Did working on the film give you any new perspective?** I more or less *had* to adapt it, since reading the novel set my brain whirring. I didn't even know what passing was when I picked up the book, and when I finished reading it, I suddenly had language for so much of what I had experienced in my own family. I started out thinking, "Wow, this is what my grandfather did." And then, eventually, "Wow, this is what my mother was doing too." I ended up at this place where I realized, "Wow, this is what I'm doing." It's been a ride. —CHARLOTTE COLLINS



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## Ifeoma Ozoma

"I'm tenacious as all hell, and I'm positive that came from my upbringing in Alaska as the daughter of Nigerian immigrants," says Ozoma, an advocate for transparency and accountability in tech. Last year, she launched the Tech Worker Handbook, a collection of resources for those in the field who are considering whistleblowing. Ozoma's determination to change the industry also led her to cosponsor California's Silenced No More Act, which took effect January 1. The legislation stops companies from enforcing NDAs in situations where discrimination is reported, giving 40 million workers the freedom to be vocal about issues like harassment and racism in the workplace.



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## Domino Kirke-Badgley

After the challenging birth of her first son left her wishing she'd had additional support, Kirke-Badgley set out to be that person for other parents-to-be and built a practice as a doula. In September, Kirke-Badgley, who is also a singer, and her Brooklyn-based collective, Carriage House Birth, published *Life After Birth: Portraits of Love and the Beauty of Parenthood* to share the raw and real birth stories of both celebrities and everyday people. "I hope the book reminds our readers that the art of storytelling is the ultimate healer and that we need each other now more than ever," she says. "Giving birth is a huge amount of inner work and should not be done in silos."



# 41 Leyna Bloom

Bloom's *Sports Illustrated* cover in July marked the first time a transgender model graced the front of the brand's iconic Swimsuit Issue. To the model and actress, it represented years' worth of efforts to bolster trans representation in mainstream media. "When I saw [my cover], I saw hard work," she says. "Not just my hard work, the hard work of so many who had the strength to go out in the world and say, 'I belong in this space.' That magazine represents a conversation to invite people to think differently."



# 42 Leah Thomas

The founder of Intersectional Environmentalist is building toward a greener, more equitable future by advocating for both sustainability and social justice while spotlighting communities that have been underrepresented in the space. "I want resources and funding to go to BIPOC-led environmental justice organizations, activists, and research institutions so that people of color will no longer face the brunt of climate injustice," says Thomas. She's aiming to set the movement on the right path with her new book, *The Intersectional Environmentalist: How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People + Planet*.

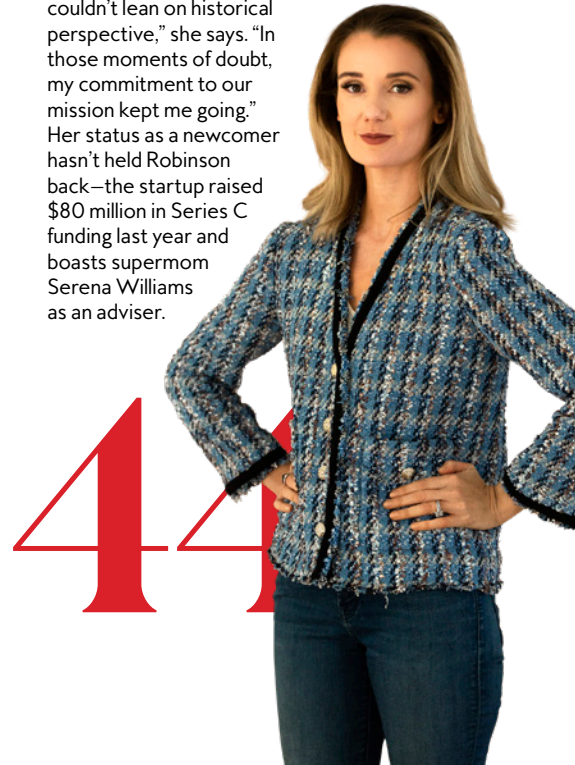
# Meryland Gonzalez

"As a boxer, it takes blood, sweat, and tears to get where you want to be," says the 15-year-old, whose journey overcoming a mysterious illness to return to the ring was the focus of *Team Meryland*, a documentary that made the rounds at several Oscar-qualifying film festivals last year. As she rises through the ranks in the boxing world, Gonzalez is giving back to her Watts, California, community through her (free) club for fitness and self-defense. She's currently eyeing a spot on Team USA at the 2024 Olympics in France, but she wouldn't call competing in them a dream of hers, per se. "A dream is something you think you want to do," Gonzalez says. "This is a goal, because with the help of my family and supporters, I know I can do it."



# Allison Robinson

Between March and April of 2020, 3.5 million mothers with school-age children left the workforce. Despite the easing of lockdowns and a gradual return to regular working conditions, the number of moms employed in the latter part of 2021 was still below pre-pandemic numbers. With The Mom Project, Robinson is giving those who are ready to resume employment a chance to find work through its digital marketplace, which connects mothers with economic opportunities that match their preferences. "Founding a business without experience in running a company has battle-tested my own beliefs and convictions time and time again, because I couldn't lean on historical perspective," she says. "In those moments of doubt, my commitment to our mission kept me going." Her status as a newcomer hasn't held Robinson back—the startup raised \$80 million in Series C funding last year and boasts supermom Serena Williams as an adviser.





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# Mariska Hargitay

The star and executive producer of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* continues to fight for sexual assault survivors.

**SVU hit 500 episodes this season. How does it feel to lead TV's longest-running scripted drama?** I have an overwhelming feeling of gratitude, and I'm proud that the series that's taken up the most room on the television landscape tells the stories of survivors of sexual assault. We've always made a show that shed light into darkness, and so much light has flooded into that darkness in the real world now too.

**In what ways has the conversation surrounding sexual assault evolved?** When we started the show in 1999, it was swept under the rug. Even in 2004 when I started the Joyful Heart Foundation, people shut me down. It wasn't a physical or medical condition, so they didn't want to give money to or support these issues. It's a victory that we are talking about the demand for a change in behavior now.

**Part of Joyful Heart's mission is to eliminate the rape kit backlog. How?** We're working to pass six pillars of reform in all 50 states, including annual statewide inventory of untested kits, mandatory testing of backlogged kits and new kits, statewide tracking systems, a victim's right to notification, and funding for reform.

**Has your work with the foundation impacted the show?** One huge shift in the field was understanding that a survivor's memory is not linear, which changed how we interview survivors on *SVU*. I've also learned the power of being believed, and it's a lesson for humanity.

**Do you ever take a break?** As women, we can easily dismiss ourselves to take care of others. Lately I've been practicing saying no; there's only so much time in a day. My children replenish my spirit, and when I'm alone I watch documentaries. I enjoy learning people's stories.

—SAMANTHA SIMON

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# Sara Wahedi

When an explosion yards from her home in Kabul left Wahedi with questions and nowhere to turn for answers, she was moved to start working on Ehtesab. The app crowdsources verified reports to provide residents of Afghanistan with information on emergency situations like bombings and roadblocks, contextualizing events that can be unsettling, confusing, and dangerous to those nearby. "Ehtesab has taught me that individuals with lived experience, especially those who have spent their lives in fragile states, have incredible capacity in building innovative solutions for tomorrow," says Wahedi. "Being an Afghan requires grit; we are consistently having to prove ourselves in every aspect, and this is exacerbated by the fact that I'm also an Afghan woman. By forcing myself to stand tall, maintaining my self-respect and belief in my abilities, I've pushed through some incredibly difficult moments, and it has all been worth it."



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# Sian Proctor

Proctor's radio call sign, "Leo" (short for Leonardo da Vinci) is a nod to her status as a modern-day renaissance woman. A geologist, an artist, a science communicator, and an astronaut, she became the first Black woman to pilot a spacecraft as part of SpaceX's Inspiration4 mission in September. "When people ask me if I was afraid to lift off to space, I tell them no, I was more afraid that this moment would never come," says Proctor. "My father was a hidden figure who worked as a NASA contractor during the Apollo missions. He inspired me to become a scientist, an explorer, and now an astronaut. When my time finally arrived, I was excited and ready."

# Nyakio Grieco

"It was a challenge turning pain to purpose," says Grieco, co-founder of Thirteen Lune, an e-comm website dedicated to BIPOC-owned beauty brands that launched after the racial reckoning of 2020. She has now raised over \$3 million via the Fearless Fund to expand the business and recently partnered with JCPenney to include Thirteen Lune pop-ups in over 600 of its stores. "I have gone from making my grandmother's coffee scrub with my brand Nyakio Beauty to now being a retailer in a major department store, celebrating inclusion for all. Growth often hurts, but living in my purpose has truly been the greatest gift of all."



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# 50 Betty Reid Soskin

At 100 years old, Soskin is the oldest serving National Park Service ranger—and a mighty witness to history. Soskin was a prominent songwriter during the Civil Rights Movement and a union boilermaker clerk during WWII whose perspective helped shape Rosie the Riveter national park in Richmond, California. She started as a ranger at age 85. "I had lived my life and could go on preserving the history for those who came to see me," she says. Lately she's been working remotely through video sessions, but on a typical non-pandemic day, Soskin plays a film about the park for visitors and steps in after it ends to share priceless knowledge about the often erased contributions of women and African Americans. Looking ahead, she has no plans to retire. "Being a badass means that one is in line with what's new," she says. "I do consider myself to be one."



# 46 Jane Pauley

"As a child, I remember reading *We Were There* books about important events and figures in history," says the broadcasting legend. "I grew up to 'be there'—appearing on TV five mornings a week for 13 years, and then almost as many times a week in prime time." This year the beloved *CBS Sunday Morning* host will celebrate her fifth decade since starting as a general assignment reporter in her hometown of Indianapolis. With experience came accolades—including last year's Daytime Emmy Award for Outstanding Morning Show—as well as perspective. What motivates her now? "I'm ambitiously and eagerly looking for what's next," says Pauley. "This is the story of my life: From my teens until today, I never sought opportunity. It was there waiting for my answer. Ready or not, I said yes. I don't know what's next, but I expect to be surprised."

"I never sought opportunity. It was there waiting for my answer. Ready or not, I said yes." —JANE PAULEY



From top: Pauley with U.S. Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg; with designer Ralph Lauren.

# Eliza Griswold

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life-and-death decision-making, not to mention money, flowing through your electronic devices. What does the scene of you doing this work look like, if you can give us a word portrait?

**EG:** It's an absurd dislocation that civilians like ourselves were helping to run operations in encrypted chats on our phones. We were never alone; there were so many heroic people in special operations and intelligence who stepped up and helped us. Through WhatsApp, we were connected with an amazing Afghan here in America who translated directions to meeting locations. You see family by family appearing in a chat where we're outlining it all. Then I'm coordinating with the special operations guy who's running the airport, and he needs to get permission, and he knows our buses are coming. So there's the military contractor we're paying for the buses, and he's coordinating with those drivers. And then suddenly some unknown person drops into the chat and informs us it's a go, we may move forward.

**JK:** And where are you sitting when this is happening?

**EG:** Literally in a pair of running shorts on my back porch. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of us all working on this through our phones and laptops. I don't have a physical experience of being in my body during that time—there was no sleep. I didn't know it was possible to not sleep for two weeks at a time. My sister completely stepped in and got my little one to camp and back. It's had long-reaching effects for him—he's pretty angry about it and confused—but it's just a tiny thing when you consider that the Afghan family I was working most closely with didn't sleep for six months. With every family that gets out, only part gets out.

**JK:** I think this is a particularly appropriate question for a fashion magazine, which, in a way, is an escape from these types of things: Do you feel like all these years into your career you have a way of countenancing the suffering in the world? Do you struggle to deal with it, or in some ways are you drawn to it?

**EG:** In most of my earlier career working in conflict zones I was fascinated by risk, but it also had to do with this theory of liminality, which is a religious theory concerning the edges in liminal spaces, like the edges of societies and of civilizations, which are dangerous. Typically, Americans do not value going to “the edge”; we don't listen to people on the edge. All of our traditional coming-of-age rituals involve

going out to some weird edge, but we don't do that. We don't welcome that.

**JK:** We're scared of it.

**EG:** But I'm deeply intrigued by the edges of things, which feels more honest to me because it's not morally loaded with the notion of “I'm going to go be of service in x and y.” To watch people in the most extreme moments of their lives show up in profound ways that are heroic and sometimes the opposite is just a crazy privilege. I'm interested in trying to find out where the meaning lies in this experience of being human.

**JK:** You're a journalist, and for your whole career, you've been an observer. We know that journalists affect things as we report on them, but your job was really to hold back. What did it feel like to get involved?

**EG:** It felt like the U.S. had set a building on fire and locked the doors, and that those of us who had been inside the building knew people who were trapped. The best we could do was throw buckets of water. It did not feel like a choice at any point, because every single resource anybody could mobilize was necessary.

**JK:** So you're like, “I can't control what my country does, but I, Eliza Griswold, am going to show up.”

**EG:** It's not even a question, right? It's like, “How do I actually employ decades' worth of resources and connections from working in journalism to save lives when it really matters?” From the Hollywood stars who reached out to fundraise to email chains that I have been on with people at the highest level of the State Department, it was all a group effort.

**JK:** I'm going to ask you one last thing that is geared toward this issue's theme. And forgive me for mentioning a man.

**EG:** No!

**JK:** Your husband, Steve Coll, who is the dean of the Columbia Journalism School, told me something interesting recently. He said that 70 percent of his grad students are female, which blew my mind because I came of age in male-dominated newsrooms. I asked myself, and I wanted to ask you, are we potentially heading into a future in which journalism is a majority female field?

**EG:** Now, that would be badass! ■

## Gal On the Go

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anything risky on my end. I feel privileged and grateful and lucky, coming from a tiny place in the Middle East and getting to work with amazing people. I feel like, “Fuck that, just be grateful and shut up.” It

takes a lot of hard work, which I'm happy to give. We're very family-oriented, so being away from our families in Israel is a price you pay. You can't eat the cake and leave it full, if you say that?

**LB:** You can't have your cake and eat it too?

**GG:** Aha, yes.

**LB:** Tell me, how ambitious were you coming up?

**GG:** I'm hungry, and I've always been this way. My parents taught me, “Be like a horse.” Horses are only focusing on their lane, so they were like, “Just focus on your own path.”

**LB:** What are you ambitious for now?

**GG:** I think at the beginning of my career it was, “Get a job as an actress.” I got that in Israel; then it was, “Get a job as an actress in America.” Then, “Get a meaningful role.” Now it is to tell stories that are meaningful for me, but also to develop our own thing. I want our production company [Pilot Wave] to be solid, and to use that to control my career destiny as far as I can.

**LB:** Can I assume Pilot Wave doesn't refer to Wonder Woman waving from the jet?

**GG:** It comes from quantum physics. It's a theory that everything in reality is guided by this little “pilot wave” that shows particles exactly where to go; it leads things and opens the way for everything to happen just as it should.

**LB:** When did you first feel like you had power “in the room”?

**GG:** After the success of *Wonder Woman*. I could not believe that happened to me. When I was told that I was going to have my own solo movie, I was like, “Holy shit. They're going to find out I'm not a real actress.” You know the imposter syndrome? I was just like, “Fake it until you make it.” Then I was blessed to work with an amazing partner, [director] Patty Jenkins. We were literally arm to arm, shoulder to shoulder. We did it together. After we proved to the studio that we could bring people to the theaters and make it work, something really shifted.

**LB:** With the pay disparity in Hollywood, did other actresses come to you after that success and go, “Shit. Finally. I've been over here making one-tenth of Jack's money”?

**GG:** Yes, multiple actresses reached out. There was a big sense of camaraderie. People love to portray women as if we catfight and we're jealous, but there was so much love and support, and like, “Yes! Finally!” I got that from amazing women around the world—big actresses too. I thought, “Oh my god, I can't believe she just thanked me.” It was interesting timing, because as the movie was coming out, the #MeToo movement really started to take off. It was as if

the stars had aligned.

**LB:** So *Wonder Woman 3* is happening, right?

**GG:** We're developing the script right now. We'll probably start in a year and a half or so.

**LB:** How does it feel to have your life mapped out?

**GG:** I love it. If there's one thing I don't like about this business, it's that usually you don't know when or where the next project will be. Once you're a mother and you have kids, you need to plan and figure out your life.

**LB:** You have three daughters [Alma, 10; Maya, 4; and Daniella, 8 months]. How protective are you?

**GG:** They're the only thing I make sure to keep as private as possible. I want them to be naive and safe and protected. I share a lot—I believe that if I went through experiences that people can relate to or learn from, great. But as far as my family goes, I'm very protective.

**LB:** What does the word “badass” mean to you?

**GG:** Strong, confident, sexy, smart.

**LB:** Who would you say is badass?

**GG:** Patty Jenkins, Halle Berry, Kari Skogland, and, of course, Chloé Zhao. All of them are filmmakers.

**LB:** Kari is directing your *Cleopatra* film. I assume it will be different from the Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton version, but how do you see it?

**GG:** I can't reveal a lot, but I can tell you that we're going to celebrate the Cleopatra story. We're going to show not just how sexy and appealing she was, but how strategic and smart, and how much impact she had and still has on the world we're living in today. I've watched all the Cleopatra movies throughout history, but I feel like we're telling the story the world needs to hear now.

**LB:** How do you personally avoid snakes in your life?

**GG:** You try to choose the right people.

**LB:** Have you always had a good bullshit detector?

**GG:** I think so. As a kid, my mom told me, “Don't be friends with her.” You have the senses for it.

**LB:** What's the most badass thing you've ever done?

**GG:** Shooting a movie while being pregnant, or when you have a baby. When you're on set, you're like a kite. You can fly so high and try to catch the air. Then you go back home to do your main shift as being a mother. It's not about me, it's, “OK, now I need to bathe Maya, feed Alma, put Daniella to bed.” That is the badass thing I do: the juggling be-

tween my family life and my acting career.

**LB:** One of the girls is screaming and you're like, “Christ, I was a kite earlier today.”

**GG:** It's true. I was shooting a scene in London on a gimbal of an airplane, and I was stuck there. Alma had a show at school that I couldn't go to, and I spoke to her afterward and asked, “How was it?” She was crying, asking me why I wasn't there. Then I started to cry, but I was trying not to show Alma that I was crying.

**LB:** Hold on. Were you crying in the Invisible Jet?

**GG:** Yes, I was!

**LB:** No one can see you.

**GG:** Aha, everyone could see me. There was a camera in front of me, one on my side, and one from Chris [Pine]'s side. There's no privacy whatsoever.

**LB:** That's what I attempt to do with the magazine. It's like, “Yeah, here are these ladies and they have money and nice dresses, but the pressure on them and the violation of their privacy is bigger.” Don't envy anyone.

**GG:** The bigger the success, the bigger the price.

**LB:** What does money mean to you?

**GG:** It's important for me. I always cared about being independent and working. I started working when I was 12, babysitting and doing camps for little ones.

**LB:** A lot of women still shy away from talking about money.

**GG:** Sometimes it's not about the money, but more about what the money symbolizes. I'm a pleaser, and when I was little, I used to double-book playdates because I felt bad saying no. My mom told me, “When you say no, people respect you more.” I have a fight within me—the pleaser and the girl who wants to be assertive. So, with money, it's not always about the sum, but if my fellows left and right are making this and I'm bringing the same value, I would love to be equal. I don't like the word “respect,” because it has ego elements, but people take you more seriously when you treat yourself seriously.

**LB:** It means equity. It means freedom. This is a blunt question: How vain are you?

**GG:** With fashion? I'm awful. At work they put makeup on me, but I don't like to wear makeup day-to-day. I hate fittings. If you ever speak to Elizabeth [Stewart, Gadot's stylist], ask her how much she enjoys our time together. I'm like, “Things to do, places to go. Let's find the best dress that I love, and done.” I was a model, so I can do the on-and-off thing quickly. I'm not really vain, because I don't spend a lot of time indulging myself with those type of things. However, I am a sucker for spa and body

treatments. I love those.

**LB:** Your red Loewe dress for the *Red Notice* premiere was perfect. You're like, “OK, you want a glamorous movie star? I'm going to give you one.”

**GG:** It was my first carpet since I had Daniella. I was like, “I want to feel like I'm back in the game, because I've been pregnant for almost a year. I want to feel like a woman.” By the way, I was working out, getting ready for it. I was watching what I was eating and all of that.

**LB:** Three children ain't nothing.

**GG:** Yes, but I started young. I was 25 when I was pregnant with Alma. I always wanted to be a young mother. Yeah, three kids. No joke, woman. God bless them, but it's so much work.

**LB:** Did you feel good through your third pregnancy and after?

**GG:** I love giving birth. I would do it once a week if I could. It's so magical. And I always take epidurals, to be fair, so it's not so painful. Just the moment you feel like you're creating life, it's incredible. But the pregnancies are hard for me—I feel sick and have migraines. I'm not in my element.

**LB:** You've been married 13 years. I know your husband, Jaron, is now producing with you. What insurance is it to have someone who's been there since the before times?

**GG:** It's huge. We've grown together. I know he's not with me because I'm a “movie star.” He's with me because he loves me. The connection was there from the beginning before everything, so it always felt very real and very good. I'm super grateful that I got to meet him when I was 20. I was a baby.

**LB:** Were you in combat training?

**GG:** I was still in the army, yes. He met me in uniform. [laughs] He loved it. I still had one year left in my service.

**LB:** What do you think he's proudest of you for?

**GG:** That I stayed the same. I maybe evolved, but I didn't change. [Jaron walks into the room.]

**GG:** [to Jaron] Come say hi to Laura.

**JARON VARSANO:** Hi, Laura from *InStyle*.

**LB:** I was just asking, in what ways are you proud of Gal?

**JV:** That's easy. In the roller-coaster life that we're living, she manages to keep a very balanced family life and work, and everything is just smooth. That's a very impressive thing, to juggle everything at the same time and stay normal.

**GG:** I said he'd probably say I didn't change; I might have evolved, but I never changed. The “normal” kind of gives that.

**JV:** Exactly.

**LB:** Ten points for Jaron!

**GG:** Awesome. We did it. ■