

Book Review: New Female Tribes by Rachel Pashley

In New Female Tribes: Shattering Female Stereotypes and Redefining Women Today, Rachel Pashley presents the results of a survey of over 8000 women aged 17-70 in nineteen different countries, navigating the reader through a series of snapshots that show how women see themselves around the globe today. While at times engaging in broad brush-stroking in its depiction of four female ‘tribes’, this is a hopeful, optimistic book that challenges advertisers and the media to better represent the rich diversity of women’s lives around the world, writes [Suyin Haynes](#).

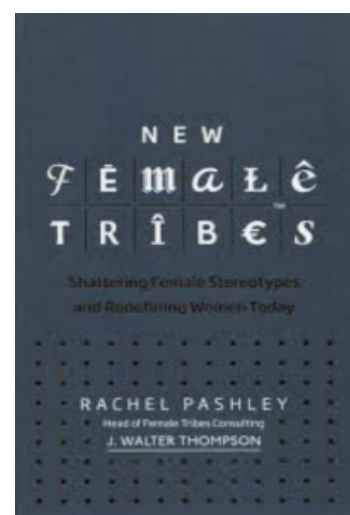
***New Female Tribes: Shattering Female Stereotypes and Redefining Women Today.* Rachel Pashley. Virgin Books. 2018.**

Find this book: 

Last month, [the US Open saw one](#) of its most controversial tennis finals in modern memory, in a showdown between sporting legend Serena Williams and new kid on the block Naomi Osaka. Accused by umpire Carlos Ramos of taking illicit coaching tips from the sidelines, Williams fought back in a fiery on-court confrontation, calling Ramos a ‘thief’ and a ‘liar’. The incident sparked debate both in support of and criticising Williams, who said in a press conference after the match that: ‘for me to say “thief” and for him to take a game, it made me feel like it was a sexist remark. He’s never taken a game from a man because they said “thief”.’

The double standard that Williams was referring to, as well as the [racist](#) and [misogynistic](#) vitriol that she received (and not for the first time in her career), is just one of the multitude of examples of the challenges faced by women around the world that Rachel Pashley cites in her recent book, *New Female Tribes*. From women in STEM to female filmmakers, parenting in the Asia-Pacific region to political participation in South Africa, Pashley navigates the reader through a series of snapshots depicting the rich diversity of women’s lives around the world today, and how they see themselves reflected in the media, advertising and popular culture.

The basis for *New Female Tribes* lies in a mass study undertaken by Pashley, Head Strategist at global advertising agency J. Walter Thompson. Called ‘the largest female insight survey ever undertaken’, Pashley’s study surveyed over 8000 women aged 17-70 over five years in nineteen different countries with the intention to reveal how women see themselves across the globe today, and to explore the idea of ‘Female Capital’: in other words, the values and achievements that women bring to the world simply as women, beyond the antiquated stereotypes of being solely caregivers and childbearers.



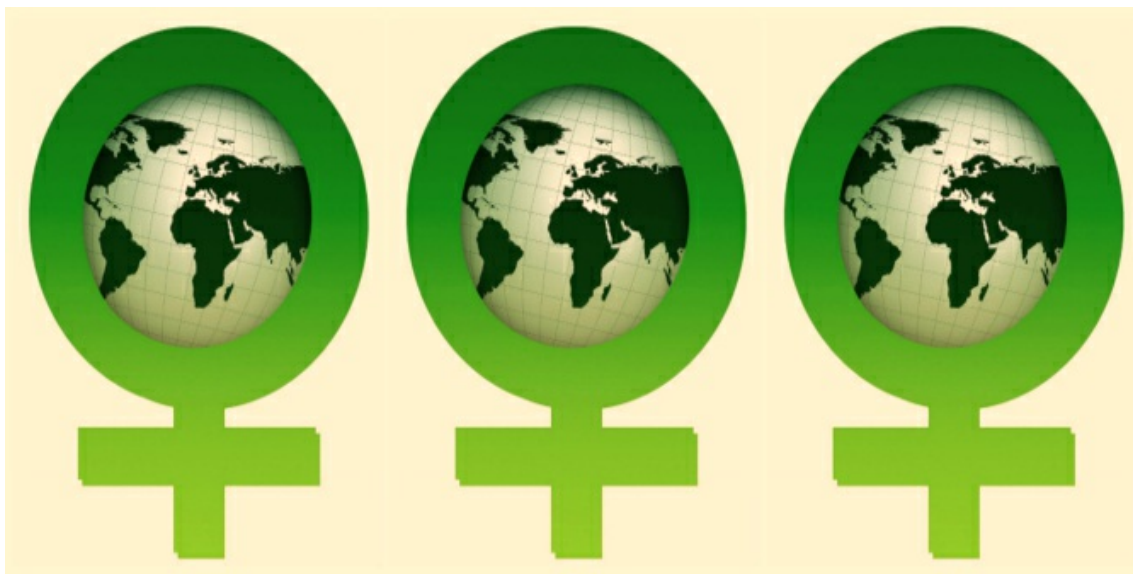


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Surveying women from all different ethnicities and income levels, Pashley draws out four main ‘tribes’, intended to bring nuance to traditional stereotypes of women across the world, rather than using hackneyed phrases like ‘busy working mum’ or ‘ambitious go-getter’. Stemming from her background in advertising and marketing, Pashley then weaves together takeaways for brands in each chapter, detailing how a deeper understanding of the ways women across the world see themselves is an untapped resource for advertisers to properly represent and appeal to women in a variety of ways.

Globally, 76 per cent of women surveyed in the study said they felt it had never been a better time to be a woman. Certainly, the book’s release comes at a particularly profound time for women the world over: during the past two years, women in the US and beyond have been spurred into action, from [political protest](#) against the presidency of Donald Trump to the [#MeToo social movement](#) that has spread far beyond the borders of North America, reaching high profile figures in entertainment and politics [across India](#) and [Asia](#) in recent months. Growing conversations about [harassment](#) and [pay inequality](#) have rippled across much of Europe, and in cultural terms, the proliferation of entertainment content created by women such as [Wonder Woman director Patty Jenkins](#) and showrunner supreme [Shonda Rhimes](#) has been phenomenally successful.

Pashley takes on the admirable feat of placing cultural touchstones and newsworthy references amongst the findings of the international survey, whilst also teasing out the definitions of her four tribes: the Alphas (women focused on career and achievement); the Hedonists (women who focus on pleasure and self-development); the Traditionalists (women concentrating on the home and children); and the Altruists (women who focus on community and environment). At times, the connective tissue between all these facets becomes a little unwieldy, and the delineation between each ‘tribe’ and its corresponding sub-tribes can be slightly difficult to follow (although helpfully explained in list format in the book’s appendix).

While it might seem like Pashley’s work actually reinforces stereotypes of women simply through the very act of categorising a whole gender, the detail in the vignettes she paints of women across the world suggests her painstaking care and passion to contribute more nuance to such sociological narratives. We are introduced to ‘Latina Matriarchs’, defined as women in leadership roles across Latin America who are keen promoters of community development and social pioneers; confident ‘Mumbai Millennial’ women with belief in their own economic and career success; and ‘Modern Courtesans’, encompassing young women with the belief that with great femininity comes great power and influence as they navigate the modern dating and relationship landscape. Pashley’s argument for some of these characters is more compelling than others; yet we can wonder just how feasible it is to categorise women based on a study this international and comprehensive without some sense of broad brush-stroking.

‘The more I researched’, Pashley writes, ‘the more I realised with a sickening consistency how systematically women’s contributions had been at best minimised and at worst, completely airbrushed from history’. Despite the challenges, Pashley strikes a hopeful tone about what comes next for women, and the future of feminism as a whole (71 per cent of women surveyed said they felt that feminism was on the rise, and 62 per cent said they were proud to be a feminist, with this response most prevalent in India at 85 per cent). Williams echoed this sentiment in her press conference after her US Open final, where she said she was ‘going to continue to fight for women’, despite what had happened earlier in the day. Pashley writes that: ‘it’s hard not to feel encouraged that perhaps we are entering into a new era — one of meritocracy where a woman can finally take an equal share of opportunities.’ And that is the tone this book strikes: one of optimism and a journey towards a far brighter future for women, should their needs for representation be met. The challenge she poses to advertisers, the media and the general reader is whether they’re up for the ride.

- *This review originally appeared at the [LSE Review of Books](#).*

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