THE NEW FACE OF STRENGTH
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Throughout history, strength has predominately been characterized and exhibited as a physical trait, from descriptions of great empires, to expressions of strength in sculptural masterpieces. Our points of reference shape our understanding of what it means to ‘be strong’, yet these references are limiting in their failure to reflect the non-physical trait of inner strength.

Inner strength and the need for inner strength have traditionally been much more closely associated with women than men. Perhaps because it can be seen as a ‘one gender’ issue, it’s an area that has not yet been openly discussed or explored in-depth.

Recently however, popular culture has started embracing the discourse around the concept. These conversations are being heard across all parts of society. In government women are increasingly prominent as leaders and holders of high office, while in business, organizations like ‘The 30% Club’ are leading the way in the effort to achieve greater gender balance on the executive boards of the world’s leading companies.

Increased awareness of women’s unique strengths may help explain why the six thousand women we surveyed said inner strength is as important as happiness in today’s world.

Special K believes in empowering women to live at full strength in all aspects of their lives. And as such, we want to shed light on the multifaceted nature of strength, reframing it as something we posses both inside and out.

Although there’s no singular definition of inner strength, women overwhelmingly believe that it’s key to reaching their full potential. These women also noted the importance of good nutrition in fuelling that strength – both physically and psychologically. That’s why, as a food brand, we’re committing to play an active role in helping women the world over to discover their strength.

The following paper looks more closely at what inner strength means to women and the ways in which it can impact their lives. It’s our hope that by sharing the findings of our research, we can help women leverage and nurture their inner strength in ways that will help every woman reach her full potential.

Shweta Harit
Special K Aims To Support Women In Redefining What It Means To Be Strong. The First Step To Achieving This Goal Is Increasing Understanding Of Inner Strength. Special K Commissioned Independent Research To Better Understand What Defines Women’s Inner Strength.

**Methodology**

**Primary Research Phase**
The research surveyed over 6,000 women across Australia, Canada, France, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the United States. We spoke to women aged 21-55 via a quantitative online survey fielded between December 2015 and January 2016. Each country sample was nationally representative of the online population.

**Secondary Research Phase**
In order to inform the survey and our understanding of inner strength, analysis of existing research and publications was conducted. This included an in-depth review of existing academic articles, media mentions and various other sources.

Additionally, expert interviews were conducted to help identify contributing attributes of inner strength. Experts spoken to included: Christopher Wanjek, health and science author; Susan Pick, social psychologist; Robyn Moreno, Latina lifestyle expert; Miriam Levin, health and wellness writer; Marquita Herald, emotional resilience author and Rick Hanson, psychologist and author.
Her strength in today's world
Importance of traits for women in today’s world

Popular culture is evolving society’s notion of strength, particularly strength among women. Across all sections of society – from business to entertainment, government to modern feminism – influential women are defining and leading this charge: Sheryl Sandberg; Emma Watson; Michelle Obama; Angela Merkel; and Tina Brown. With such inspiring voices championing societal discourse on women’s abilities and the need for true gender equality in the 21st century, it’s not surprising that women recognize that inner strength is now as important as happiness in today’s world.

And there is a noticeable gap between internal traits such as happiness and inner strength and external (some might say, superficial) traits such as wealth and beauty, which have been the recipients of increased attention in the past.
Women say that feeling strong is as important as happiness in today’s world. But is inner strength the key to happiness? According to women, its impact is much broader.

Confidence (60%), being in control (56%), motivation (54%), productivity (45%) and communication (26%) are just some of the things affected by inner strength. The stronger a woman feels, the more confident and motivated she is – which, in turn, impacts her positivity and proactivity. In fact, 9 out of 10 women consider inner strength to be key to success, just ahead of intellect.

With inner strength recognized as having such an impact, it is not surprising that while 77% of women feel they possess inner strength, three quarters still wish they possessed even greater reserves. The numbers are even more pronounced among younger women – 82% of whom wish they possessed greater reserves of inner strength.
Female strength is multi-dimensional

To help women reach their full potential it is important to recognize the multidimensionality that characterizes female strength.

Historically, strength has been one dimensional and relatively masculine. However, when thinking about inner strength, women understand it to be individual, multifaceted and innately female.

What makes it so distinctly female is the broad range of attributes it embodies, covering the more commonly associated notions of strength, such as determination and courage, as well as softer attributes like compassion and spirituality.

In their own words, women interpret and describe inner strength in many ways: courage; being true to yourself; resilience; determination; resourcefulness; an intangible yet ever present power within them. For many, strength is as much about perseverance as the ability to thrive. And because it is so personal, 9 out of 10 women can actively provide their own individual definition of inner strength.

“Inner strength is the ability to endure life’s tribulations and grow stronger in the face of adversity”
When women were asked how inner strength is demonstrated, as many as ten unique indicators were deemed significant:

"A sense of confidence and resilience that comes from within that doesn’t rely on other people or things (like a job or money)"

"It is the ability to draw on my capabilities, fairness, resources and experiences"
2. Valuing her inner strength
Understanding the dimensions of a woman’s inner strength can go a long way in helping women and society to embrace and harness it. Yet this is an inherently under-recognized trait, in part because of its variability.

Women currently display their strength differently in different situations. While this flexibility is an asset, its fluidity can also lead to women not utilizing their full selves within a given situation. Women have told us that at work they are more likely to rely on traits such as resilience and determination, while softer attributes such as compassion tend to take a back seat.

As the dialogue of strength moves on, women are being encouraged to recognize the power of softer attributes. Businesses and governments are also starting to recognize the benefits of encouraging traits more commonly associated with women in the workplace.
'The Athena Doctrine: How Women (and the Men Who Think Like Them) Will Rule the Future', calls for businesswomen to tap into their full selves, something not always put into practice in a work environment.

It outlines the benefits of focusing on traditionally female characteristics as a way of adding value to their company and contribute to a more positive future.

It found that 66% of people from Asia, Europe and South America agree that the world would be a better place if men thought more like women.

The feminine traits that appealed to respondents included being honest, humble, creative, family-orientated, adaptable, sensitive and trustworthy.

As a result, The Athena Doctrine concludes that ‘traditionally feminine leadership and values are now more popular than the macho paradigm of the past’.

'The Athena Doctrine found that 66% of people from Asia, Europe and South America agree that the world would be a better place if men thought more like women.'
INGRAINED FEMALE CHALLENGES ARE holding women back

Previous studies have shown that men will apply for roles when they meet 60% of the hiring criteria, whilst women wait until they meet 100%¹. This suggests that women are holding themselves back, failing to recognize the unique traits only they can bring to the table.

Many of the barriers holding women back are internal. Nearly half feel they aren't listening to their inner voice as much as they should, while the same amount believe they're overly influenced by self-doubt.

Women also feel they are not achieving their full potential as they can feel restricted by the expectations of others. One in three women say they make life decisions based on what others expect them to do – rather than what they personally feel they should do. Consequently as many as 43% say they have followed a career path because it’s what they thought they should do rather than what they would like to do.

Unlocking inner strength
Many factors within their own control influence and affect how strong women feel. Nutrition, fitness and mental wellness all have an impact. Indeed, two in five women agree they’re not taking care of their mental wellbeing as best they could. Over two-thirds agree that they would like more personal restorative time. Although at times this may feel impossible amidst the pressures of modern life, the value of simple pleasures is not to be underestimated. Our data suggest a mere few minutes of people-watching with a coffee in hand or simply committing to focusing on a single thing at any given time can have a remarkably positive effect.

In addition, food can play an important role, with over 60% of women interviewed believing what they eat is vital to giving them strength. 64% also say that breakfast is key to setting them up mentally and physically for the day ahead. Finally, 66% believe that when they eat healthy, nutrient rich food, they achieve more.

Of course, not all barriers reside internally. For many women, the challenges that exist in juggling work life and home life, feeling diminished as a stay-at-home mother and the strength they gain (or sometimes lose) from personal relationships can have an equally powerful impact on their feelings of strength. However, our research shows that women do realize they are drivers of their own success. 76% of women we interviewed believe inner strength comes mainly from within themselves.
66% of women believe eating healthy, nutrient-rich foods helps them achieve more.

68% state that food has an important role in building their inner strength.

73% say taking more ‘me’ time allows them to build inner strength.
Therefore it should come as no surprise that female support networks are increasingly prevalent within both the public and private spheres. Examples include ‘The 30% Club’ which calls for gender balance within the board rooms of top companies and the ‘Women’s Mafia’ which provides a platform for smalls businesses and causes, give forums for support.

- Creating a Chain of Strength -

For many women, compassion is an intrinsic element of strength. 79% agree that this trait demonstrates inner strength. In addition, women feel that by demonstrating acts of compassion, they can feel stronger in themselves.

- 80% of women state that helping others makes them feel stronger in themselves
- 83% of women state that helping others positively impacted their inner strength

Women also acknowledge the importance of receiving support and reassurance from other women, whether in the workplace or their personal lives. This guidance can empower them to achieve more;

- 57% of women say the support of another woman has helped them succeed in life
- 97% of working women say the support of another woman has helped them succeed in their career

A modern reflection of the strength we derive from the female figures in our life is the ‘Call Your Girlfriend’ podcast, a bi weekly podcast documenting the conversations of best friends living in opposite ends of the country. They discuss everything from personal events to politics, providing support, reassurance and friendship.
"RATHER THAN MAKE ANY KIND OF FEMINIST STATEMENT, I PREFER TO HAVE WOMEN GET THE ATTENTION THEY NEED BY TELLING THEIR OWN STORIES."

- TINA BROWN, FOUNDER, WOMEN IN THE WORLD -
SPECIAL K BELIEVES IN THE NEW FACE OF STRENGTH AND WE ARE COMMITTED TO:
1. Evolving Society’s Understanding of ‘Strength’

Inner strength is as valued as happiness yet it lacks the level of awareness needed to impact our daily lives. This can be changed by reframing strength as a more holistic and personal experience. That means promoting the relationship between inner strength, happiness and success, and reducing the traditional emphasis on strength as a purely physical attribute.

2. Creating a Chain of Strength

Experience, good and bad, is the greatest contributor to inner strength. Yet 57% of women say that the support from another woman has helped them succeed in life. 80% claim helping others makes them feel stronger in themselves. Connecting young women with strong role models, and encouraging women to support other women can help harness and grow inner strength so that every woman may reach her full potential. This is the sisterhood of strength – and it is invaluable to society at large.

3. Empowering Women to Nourish Their Inner Strength

Maintaining a nutritious, healthy diet and ensuring the provision of personal restorative time is vital in promoting feelings of inner strength. Special K is committed to providing delicious, nutrient-rich foods to nourish women’s inner strength both emotionally and physically, enabling women to be strong for themselves and for others.