

COMMENT

Meghan's podcast is just another way she can talk about herself

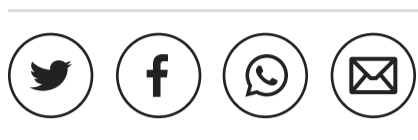
Her new Archetypes series shows there is no anecdote that the Duchess can not hijack with one of her own



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She may now be a small fish in a big pond, but I'm guessing her Spotify podcast could be a success Stateside

Meghan Markle has the perfect, smooth podcast voice. So much so that you keep expecting her to purr out some kind of self-care-style slogan: "Do something magical for you, today."


On the long-awaited first episode of her exclusive Archetypes series with Spotify, it's Serena Williams who has been invited on to "make some magic" – and she's the perfect person to kick off the show. After all, the tennis ace is a great friend of Meghan's who is in the news, having just announced her plans to retire two weeks ago. She's also famously feisty – and I'm using that word in its most positive, undertone-free sense. In the promotional guff the Duchess of Sussex has described Archetypes as a podcast "where we dissect, explore, and subvert the labels that try to hold women back".

It's hard to imagine anything holding Serena back, and the admissions the 40-year-old makes about the fear she has experienced throughout her career and the trials of motherhood are fascinating for that reason. But the podcast is an interview with this inspirational sporting figure in name only. If the rest of the season is anything like the premiere, what we're really going to be listening into week after week is Meghan interviewing herself.

Maybe the former actress doesn't realise she's doing this. Or maybe the plan was always to invite a series of foils on to debate cultural and societal unfairnesses that Meghan has (coincidentally) also been a victim of. Certainly, this week's offering, "The Misconception of Ambition", allows for maximum navel-gazing.

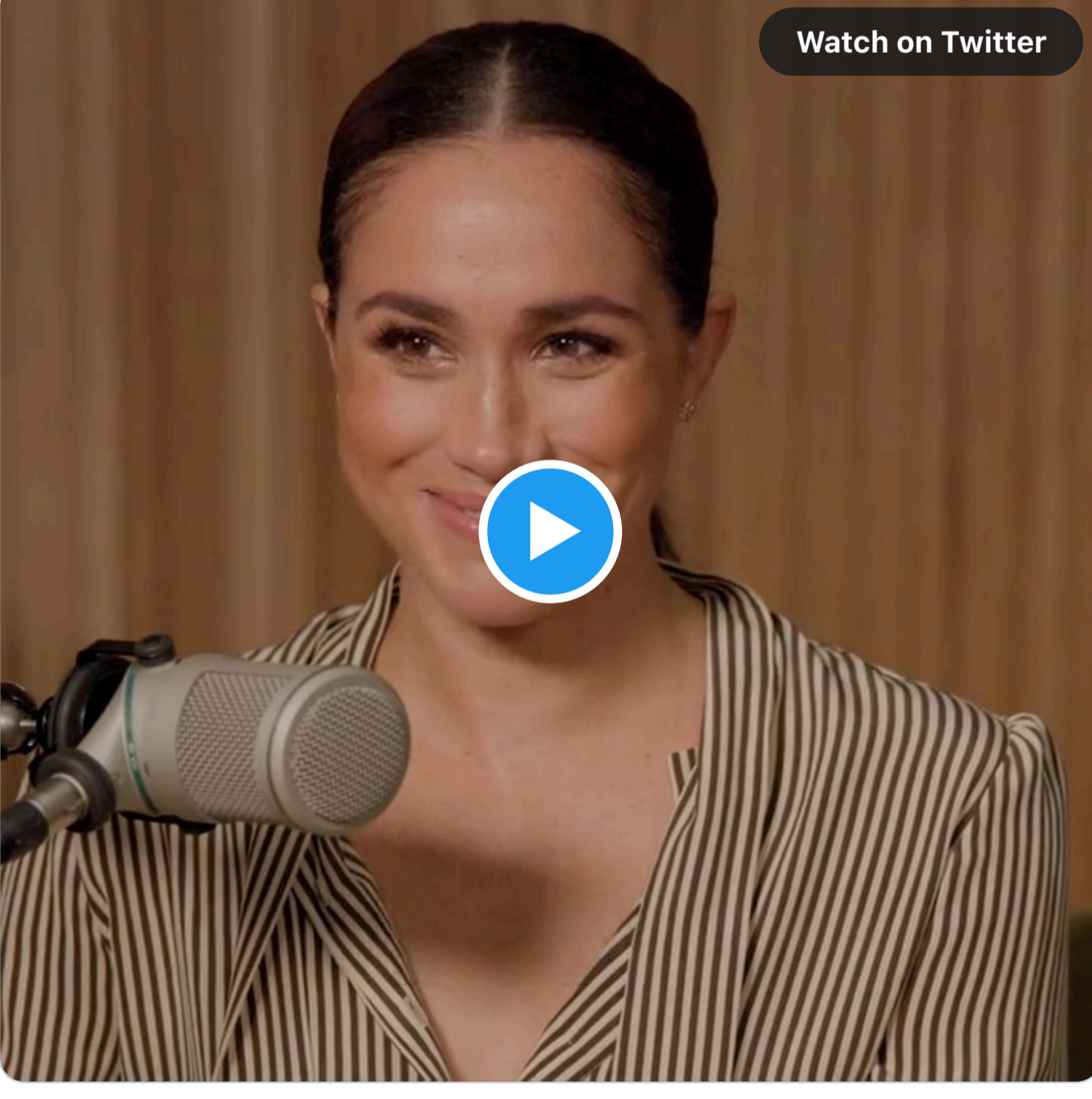
As an introduction, Meghan treats us to an exquisitely self-congratulatory (and already widely publicised) anecdote about how, as an 11-year-old, she had been incensed enough by a dishwasher soap advert with sexist language to write to Procter & Gamble and urge them to change the word "women" to "people". "Would you believe it?" she asks – still awestruck by her own trailblazing childhood self – she succeeded. "Three months later a new version of the ad appeared on TVs around the country."

Since then, she concludes with a self-deprecating laugh, "my 11-year-old voice has gotten a little more confident ... maybe a little louder."



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She's here ✨ Meghan, The Duchess of Sussex brings us a new podcast. Welcome to Archetypes spotify.link/archetypes



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It has had to, you understand. Because back then Meghan hadn't realised how many noxious forces would be trying to hold her back, keep her down, stick her in a series of little boxes. The Duchess uses the words "us", and "women" but make no mistake: we're still firmly on her and "a culture that, um," there's a wry smile in her voice, "doesn't exactly prize ambitious black women".

Even the anecdote about how Meghan first met her supposed interviewee – at a 2010 Super Bowl party – is somehow turned into self-aggrandisement. Spotting Serena heading towards someone, Meghan wondered who on earth could have sparked this special woman's interest, and – oh, my goodness! – it was her.

Twenty minutes into the hour-long podcast (and just after the Duke of Sussex has dutifully popped his head around the door and urged these two gal pals to "have fun!") one is already starting to feel rather sorry for Serena. The tennis ace has only just got started on how tough public life can be, when Meghan points out how upsetting it must also have been for Serena "when you have to see things that are mischaracterising of me, and you experience behind closed doors what has been painful for me."

Every woman has had a girlfriend like Meghan: the one who turns every confidence back to them and hijacks every distressing anecdote with one of their own – only theirs is longer drawn-out, more distressing. There's a humdrum in this podcast that I'll leave it to you to enjoy. Although to be fair, the Duchess of Sussex does throw her interviewee the occasional bone. "I've felt it," she says on one particular stigma. "And it's certainly been a big part of Serena's story as well."

To Meghan's credit, she smooths these jarring moments over beautifully, tying up each point with artfully worded self-help-isms. "Sometimes the right decision isn't the easiest decision." "That's growth, that's dimensionality." "To be ambitious: it's a beautiful thing."

She may now be a small fish in a big pond, but I'm guessing the podcast could be a success Stateside. Meghan's not just got the purr but the contacts and the cast-iron confidence to make it one.

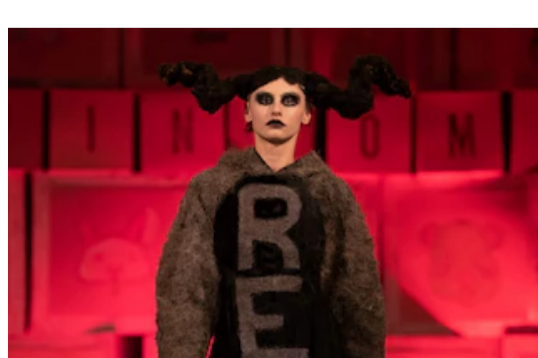
Next week, she's back with Mariah Carey – and much, much more Meghan.

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