

Having a Voice

I want to begin with a definition of voice: **right of expression; influential power**

Today I want to talk about women's voice and how I came to find mine after having lost it a very long time ago.

When I was going to therapy at the time my marriage was dissolving, I went to a male therapist who specialized in mediation. I was ending a 24 year marriage. I talked. I cried. I felt I must have sounded confused, inadequate, unable to communicate my feelings. Was I saying what I felt (did I even recognize my feelings any more?) or was I saying what I thought the therapist expected to hear? I began to examine what I was saying, why I was saying it.

At one point, the therapist said in exasperation, "Do you hear what you're saying? Are you listening to yourself? You're talking in circles!" This devastated me. I couldn't even do therapy right!

I thought about circular thinking and began to realize how necessary it was for me to come at an issue from more than one direction I walked around the issue again and again until I begin to understand. Circular thinking is very complex and its value comes from taking lots of data, examining it carefully over and over until issues become clear. Understanding becomes the goal.

Linear thinking looks at the issue as a means to an end—how does something fit in order to move on to the next point in a progression when forward motion becomes the goal.

I saw the importance of circular thinking in my decision making.

But more importantly, I had begun to listen to my own voice. I began to recognize that I had a voice. I began to honor my voice.

Right of Expression; influential power

I also cried. The therapist asked me, "Why are you crying?" He wanted me to tell him -- what -- at that moment -- was causing this crying, what was forcing this deep emotional purging? I immediately felt the guilt of being a cryer--- I was doing something wrong! Again! Then I realized I **did** need to find the root cause of this welling up of emotion. Why was I crying???? I realized it was because-- someone-- was listening to me. Someone --was hearing what I had to say. Someone--was listening to my voice. I realized how important it was that my voice be heard.

Right of expression; influential power

Remember as a young girl—your fearlessness, your determination to speak out fearlessly whatever was in your head—all the questions you had—all the whys? A lot of us can't

remember a time like that. Perhaps you remember like I do being told that ‘children should be seen and not heard.’

Right of Expression; influential power

At some point in your young girl’s life, you learned to disassociate—disconnect—from your voice. You began to be quiet—**not loud** -- because then no one would want to be around you, especially if you’re loud **and** bossy.

As a very very little girl, you absorbed many messages about your worth and by the time you were in puberty you were already beginning to doubt what you always thought you knew, you had trouble hearing or listening to your voice. You were already disconnecting the mind from the body, and were beginning to hide your questions rather than voice them.

Women in most cultures globally are not given the tools for expressing their own voice. Rather, little girls are provided models of self-sacrifice—caring for others’ needs while putting their own needs last if not neglecting them entirely, of being good “*listeners*”. In the earliest years of schooling, girls’ quiet behavior is reinforced. They are often chosen to help the teacher if they are well behaved and quiet.

My own two examples with the therapist revealed to me is that women are judged harshly—even by ourselves (**remember the predator voice?**)--for the differences in the way we process our emotions and the way we express our feelings. **We** must honor our own voices.

Right of expression; influential power

We have had a political voice for less than 100 years and only recently have we raised an authoritative spiritual voice. This is truly amazing as women’s voices reflect the opinions of 51% of the population! Our voices and opinions are unique but because they are often softly spoken – they are frequently silenced and trivialized.

The right of expression; influential power

In her book *Women Who Run With The Wolves*, Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ messages inspired me. I was thrilled to learn that my inner child—that little girl I used to be -- hadn’t disappeared. She was still there and was waiting to come out again. I knew intuitively that it would be through the child that I would find the woman.

Our voices come from a circle of personal power. It takes courage to express our voices.
We come from a center of holiness—of self love;
our personal truths light our paths;
our autonomy is our greatest beauty;
our personal freedom is a gift we give ourselves;
our energy melds our creativity with our purpose.

Freedom, voice, empowerment are essential threads in the tapestry of self.

How do women express their voice?

The right of expression; influential power

Women **VOICE** their emotions, they voice their sexuality, they voice their spirituality.

We honor our voice when we speak an opinion, when we question and challenge.

Our voice is a reflection of our feminine inner landscape—our spirituality, our sexuality, our principles and our personal code of behavior.

We have the right to express ourselves.

Women's voices have influential power: to heal, to guide, to strengthen, to encourage, to support, to teach, to love.

We honor our voices.

Rebecca

