

**CARRIE LYNN ARNOLD**

**S<sup>x</sup>ilenced  
and  
S<sup>x</sup>idelin<sup>x</sup>ed**

**HOW WOMEN LEADERS  
FIND THEIR VOICES  
AND BREAK BARRIERS**



*Praise for Silenced and Sidelined*

**“Carrie Lynn Arnold delivers a gift!”**

“If you have lived the experience her title describes, you’ll want to read this book for the perspective and framing Arnold offers. If you don’t get the title, then you need to read the book to understand better what you can do to help create a workplace and world where every voice is equally valued and heard.” —**Scott Eblin**, author of *The Next Level: What Insiders Know About Executive Success*

**“This is eye-opening.”**

“Arnold shines an illuminating light on a phenomenon that impacts all of us and opens a new way forward for men and women in positions of leadership at all levels. The world we live in demands that all of us more fully contribute, and this requires that we more fully understand the ways in which we have been silenced, as well as the ways in which we have silenced ourselves. Arnold provides an eye-opening look at where we’ve come from and where we’re going . . . and does so with courage, clarity, and commitment. Well done!” —**Chalmers Brothers**, author of *Language and the Pursuit of Happiness* and *Language and the Pursuit of Leadership Excellence*

**“A much-needed conversation is emerging.”**

“Arnold’s profound and moving research with women leaders is refreshing, poignant, and timely. The need to raise awareness—and the voices of powerful women—is more important than ever. I am thrilled to hear that Arnold’s voice will soon be added to the public discourse in a larger way: she has something important to say . . . and the world needs to hear her voice.” —**Jeffrey W. Hull**, PhD, Director of Education and Business Development, Institute of Coaching; Instructor in Psychology, Harvard Medical

School; author of *Flex: The Art and Science of Leadership in a Changing World*

**“Must-Read”**

“Arnold has captured a phenomenon that so many women have experienced but have seen as being caused by something lacking in themselves. Written with empathy in an upbeat, down-to-earth style, this is a must-read for women who aspire to any level of leadership and for their coaches who are committed to helping them be successful.” —**Carol Vallone Mitchel**, PhD, author of *Breaking Through “Bitch”: How Women Can Shatter Stereotypes and Lead Fearlessly*

**“Forcefully written and solution-oriented . . .”**

“Success requires leveraging all our talent. This can’t happen when women in our workforce are silenced. This book tells us how silencing happens at work and what we, as leaders, can do about it. This is a book to share and use.” —**Katrina S. Rogers**, PhD, president, Fielding Graduate University

**“Anyone who is a leader needs to consider Arnold’s groundbreaking research.”**

“Gut-wrenching in candor and anchored in research, this book is a game-changer and life-giver by unveiling the toxicity of silencing. Every leader—female and male—will grow in their ability to influence and lead a healthier organization by understanding the dynamics of being silenced. Arnold’s work as a scholar, practitioner, and author is pivotal!” —**Jacquie Fedo**, PCC, leadership and influence coach; founder and CEO, Coaching410; past-president, ICF Colorado

**“Finally!”**

“As a female in an executive role, I’m glad to see this particular phenomenon named in a way that makes sense. It is not just about improving our competencies or competing like a man. Arnold has put her finger on something, and by doing so, she is opening up a

new way to see, hear, explain, and identify with an issue of silencing that has long eluded women in leadership. This book belongs in the hands of every executive.” —**Amy Hanlon-Rodemich**, Chief People Officer at a digital product engineering services company

### **“Reflective and Deep!”**

“As a person who has experienced this phenomenon, this book helped me learn some things about myself. I am much more sensitive to the issues of silencing, and I found myself laughing out loud, saddened, inspired, informed, and enlightened by the content. Arnold is a gifted writer with an impressive focus; she writes in a conversational and vulnerable way that will emotionally move you.” —**Ann Holland**, PhD, owner and practitioner of Strive Performance Coaching

### **“Authentic, passionate, and important.”**

“Arnold has captured a feeling so many women leaders know but for which they have not had a term to explain it. This work demonstrates that Arnold has found her voice. Loud and clear, she provides compelling ideas and rich stories about the process of being silenced, silencing oneself, and recovery. This is an important work that all leaders should read, distribute, and follow. Following the recommendations will help empower women leaders and to make needed change in organizations.” —**Kerry Mitchell**, PhD, SHRM-SCP, Moxy Solutions, LLC

### **“This book is an awareness invitation!”**

“I wish I had read this material on silencing twenty years ago. As an executive who loves to see others grow, I believe every emerging leader, seasoned manager, and c-suite executive should peruse this material. Arnold writes in a way that challenges your thinking while inviting you to go deeper with your understanding of what it means to have voice. This book is practical, relevant, and critical. Given the complexity of our society and organizational environments—this is one to add to the nightstand!” —**Mary Shepler**, senior vice president and chief nursing officer

**“A remarkable hallmark study.”**

“There are no villains here. Everyone can experience silencing, and in this book, the hard data on silencing women is compelling and eye-opening. Arnold’s research has given birth to a book of stories, perspectives, and insights that will help anyone recognize silencing, which may be pervasive on a bigger platform in our culture, making this timely in ways that go beyond the research here. There are ways to uncover it, stop it, and heal from it, thanks to Carrie’s highly readable and fascinating book.” —**Christine Wahl**, MCC, Miro Group Consulting; founder, Georgetown University Leadership Coaching Certificate Program

# **SILENCED AND SIDELINED**





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## ***How Women Leaders Find Their Voices and Break Barriers***

**Carrie Lynn Arnold**

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*A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.*

—James Keller



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## INTRODUCTION

**W**hen I began my PhD program, I got feedback that I was a good writer, but that I was too colloquial. What an odd thing to say! I had to Google colloquial. It means informal, which begs the question of why not just say, “Carrie, be formal!” In general, academia is full of intellectuals who I am reasonably sure are reincarnated medieval torture coordinators. They poke, redline, disassemble, tweak, toss, disparage, disagree (with you and each other), and they force multiple rewrites. There is a particular way to structure, argue, read, analyze, critique, and write.

When I was putting together my book submission, my literary coach told me not to write like an academic—in other words, don’t be formal—*facepalm!* She also said, use your own voice, Carrie. And, so, I will, and thus, I do! I am a blend of informal and formal—I love language and stringing together words to form a meaningful sentence, but sometimes I just need to cuss out the phrase. It is with my voice that I introduce you to many characters and stories. Names and companies are changed to honor the confidentiality of the women who participated in this research but make no mistake; their experiences are real.

I have held onto these stories as long as I can, and now they are laid down in print. You may see glimpses of your own experience here and breathe a sigh of relief to know that you are not alone.

You may read this and scratch your head, thinking—I did not realize. Soon you will.

I am far from a passive observer of the silenced female leader. I did not witness women in leadership from some safe distance and wonder why they were not using a more effective voice. I did not ponder this from an ivory tower or a successful, high-paying corner office. I do not bring you this book about female silencing from a place of pedigree. Nor do I have lunches with CEOs from Facebook, Google, Yahoo, or the World Bank to discuss the crisis of few women in executive leadership roles and ways to mitigate those issues moving forward. At least, not yet.

As one might expect, I bring it because I lived it.

Not only did I live it—I suffered through it in crazy and indescribable ways. I then slowly climbed out of it. I realized I was beyond it. I got super curious and decided to study it.

I am about as average as a white American woman can be. I grew up with two parents, two siblings, and a mangy mutt of a dog that we bought for \$30 at a pet store. He was a smelly, Terrier-Chihuahua mix that never quite got potty trained. We named him A.J. because my mom, sister, and I had a collective crush on Jameson Parker from the TV series *Simon & Simon* that ran from 1981–1989.

I went to high school in Colorado Springs and attended a small college in Denver. I was not looking for substance, fame, or prestige. My parents were on the verge of divorce, and I needed to find a new home and get a job. College was the best direct route to ensure that was possible. I had solid grades in high school but my ACT and SAT scores were barely above average. Attending anything elite was out of the question, and since I had no idea what I wanted to do or be, I chose a bachelor's in psychology. It made sense to study something that might help me better understand myself and get a four-year degree at the same time.

My undergraduate program fostered hunger in me that was unrealized until I was a few months away from graduating. It was 1993, and I was sitting in one of my last social science classes and was told to take the remainder of the hour and write a paragraph



about my life in 2013. In my imagination ten years into the future, I wrote that I was married with one son; I had a PhD in neuropsychology and was published. In 1993, I didn't even know what neuropsychology was, but it sounded pretty cool.

Today, I am married (second husband) with one biological child (daughter) and two stepsons sixteen months apart. I often joke with others that I may not have given birth to the boys but make no mistake—there was plenty of labor. Oh, and I tried to get into a neuropsychology master's program in my mid-twenties. My legacy of poor test-taking did not improve with the GRE and no surprise, I was not granted acceptance.

The path of education for me has never entirely been straight or smooth—but it was undoubtedly a relentless internal desire to achieve. When I was twenty-five years old, I decided to make a yellow afghan. I wanted it to be large enough to cover me in a king-size bed. It took me fourteen years to finish. I called it the yellow yard. When I was thirty years old, I did go on to get a master's degree in organizational management; later, I got accepted into the leadership coach training program at Georgetown University. Eventually, like the yellow yard, and fourteen years after the master's, I got a PhD in human development. I have learned that most goals are accomplished if you give them enough time.

Parallel to that journey to get a doctorate, I had a career in healthcare. I held professional and leadership positions within HR and organization development. I am known to say that I am a recovering human resources director.

I have the same story as many of my readers. I have an ex-husband, an excellent second husband, stepchildren, a biological child, coworkers, extended family, neighbors, church, community groups, old friends, new friends, clients, pets, and life. I have a regular middle-class existence. I have a heap of failures and a mound of things that make me proud. Despite my very average reality, I am intensely aware of my privilege. I am a white, heterosexual, Christian female in good health.

I am blessed with everything I just named—my life is full of people and opportunities that leverage my voice. Those same blessings can quickly turn on me, and if I am not careful, they can silence me. The groups we belong to, the relationships we cultivate, the careers we work hard to achieve, the bosses we aim to please, the employees we hope will love us, and the customers that are always at the back of our brains can swiftly and effortlessly take our good intentions and suppress us. It is hardly a conscious move and something we rarely see coming. But it happens.

My experience with voice and silence is tangled within that twenty-year career of navigating a leadership role within the complexity of systems, relationships, and a desire to understand self. In 2011, I began my own consulting and coaching business. It was here that I paused and looked back at myself and the systems that raised me. I also reflected on the clients that I have coached and their systems. I thought about the women in my life who spoke with passion, clarity, and purpose. I also thought about the women who had it in them, but the words never surfaced. I wondered about the language women use that inspire both genders to lean in and follow. I pondered the words we hear that make us disengage and reconsider our willingness to support. I was swimming in a lot of mystery and inquiry of voice and silence—but I was mostly thwarted by what I perceived was prevalent female silencing—my own and those around me.

However, this is not my story. I had to examine myself first before I could study the silenced female leader. I had to consider my own voice box, eye color, belly button, feet, thoughts, and style of leadership. I believe this journey to understand self never entirely ends, but at times it deserves greater energy and attention. It is said that when studying phenomena in social sciences, you have to do the “mesearch” before you engage in the research. We are always the main characters in the story of our lives, and sometimes we have lengthy monologues, other times we quietly stand as others tell their story, and then there are those long pregnant pauses between lines as we move across the stage in a dance of pain and uncertainty.

I have interviewed dozens of women. They are black, brown, and white. On average, they are over the age of forty, and they represent over twenty different industries. They are directors, physicians, educators, vice presidents, and CEOs. Most are graduate prepared, and many hold doctorate degrees. From law firms to classrooms to boardrooms, these women are leading and trailblazing in ways that I admire and respect. I have not walked the same path, but as women, we are woven together in similar stories. They are survivors of silencing and have fought (and at times still fight) a vicious psychological virus. They pioneer, innovate, aspire, and propel forward despite all the obstacles they encounter. They create a mural of voice and silence and shed light on the insidiousness of silencing that the following chapters will soon highlight.

I am also keenly aware that I stand on the shoulders of remarkable women who have researched and studied women's issues. People like Susan Cain and her work on introversion describing the ones who prefer listening to speaking or Sheryl Sandberg, who artfully examined women's progress in achieving leadership roles. Amy Cuddy encourages us to bring our boldest self to our most significant challenges. Brené Brown's work on vulnerability is profound. There are other scholars who I have read and come to know like Cheryl Glenn who writes about the rhetoric of silence, Carol Mitchell whose book is about breaking through "bitch," and Deborah Tannen who was dynamic with her work on how the language of everyday conversation affects relationships. These are just a sample of women who have provided footpaths or highways into the complicated aspects of women in leadership. I stand humbly amid these giants as I bring you my nuanced findings of female leader silencing.

Silence is rarely the absence of words, and silencing can be a psychological form of violence to a person who desires to speak. We are individually and creatively woven together as human beings, and the ability to exercise choice in our actions and communication is the highest form of intelligence. When we hold leadership roles—a public position regardless of level, company, or industry—we are wired to speak with a megaphone. It is almost as if

leaders are wired with their own internal Bluetooth system that automatically connects to microphones in every conference room or conversation to carry their sound or their lack. Given this, a leader's silences, words, gestures, and language are amplified whether they want them to be or not. They need to be conscious of the difference between silence and silencing, voice and valuable voice, and whether they are just being heard or effectively heard. These are all distinctions this book unpacks in ways that will challenge your thinking about your own communication.

In addition, we can be physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually compromised when we are silenced. This compromise comes in the form of a virus that if not treated, can spread and contribute to female leadership opt-outs, glass ceilings, sticky floors, glass cliffs, and any other metaphor that may describe why women are not successfully promoting into and sustaining in their leadership careers. It is dreadfully hard to be successful as a leader if you are continually feeling unwell.

The cure for this virus is not a simple vaccine or medication—it requires a level of self-regard and community that I believe (and the research will show) that few executive women are successfully creating. Recovering from feeling silenced does not happen by accident. It occurs when female leaders earnestly shift their behaviors with the help of both men and women. So, for the men who have picked up this book by accident or by choice—please keep reading. You are not the villain in this story. You are part of the healing, and your partnership with your female colleagues will help create the needed change. It's an act of courage to be a leader, and it is a higher act to be a generous one.

For women in leadership, this book is for you whether you have experienced a form of silencing or not. If you have not, I am relieved on your behalf, but realize you may be in the minority. The majority of women are wrestling with some form of silencing and the struggle does not necessarily show. For emerging leaders who want to mitigate what is sure to be a future of many encounters that could potentially silence you, Bravo! By reading this

book, you are creating a form of self-care that will help you notice and recover when that silencing begins.

As a society, we have become too quick with naming fast solutions, strategies, techniques, and tips. We love simple lists, but there are no shortcuts highlighted here. This book is about the silenced and the path to recover and lead with a valuable voice. Sometimes we have to understand the darkness before we can fully appreciate the light. This book explores them both along with the journey in between.



# I

## HOW SILENCE IS A HIATUS OR A SCREAM

(and everything in between)

I sit in a chair outside her office exchanging small talk with her executive assistant. It has been challenging to get on her calendar, and I know I am one of several people she will meet with today, back to back, with no breaks in between. She has people in her office now, and I can hear them talking fast as they wrap up a meeting that has run over. I feel my pulse quicken as her door opens, and two colleagues shuffle out still in the middle of their conversation. I smile and return her welcome as I ask myself, *Is she too busy to shift gears and spend the next ninety minutes with me? And how much will she share?*

Her office is warm, and her furniture is cluttered with books, mementos, and personal items that suggest she has worked here for many years with a collection of experiences and memories worthy of display. Her life is documented in the photos, certificates, and diplomas framed on the walls. She is a physician turned executive and has more education and credentials than most. As I begin the interview with the click of my recorder, she responds as I expect of any c-suite leader, with a clear and concise review of

her background. As my questions pivot to those that probe into her experience of feeling silenced—I sense a subtle but guttural shift in her expression, posture, and being that widens and deepens over the next hour. It is almost as if she is raking the yard of her soul—I see her beauty, intelligence, pain, and exposure.

I ask her a question about what it feels like to be silenced. She looks me deep in the eyes as she says, “Feeling silenced? Carrie, it is almost like subcellular toxicity.” Her words stop, start, and get tousled together as she continues.

And I do mean literal cells, and I do mean spirit, and I do mean mind. It impacts the mind, body, and spirit. We endure these tiny bits of arsenic. Whether we are women, we are black people; we are disabled people, or we who are the “others.” It’s like taking a tiny bit of it every day. Then we wonder how it ends up manifesting itself?

She then pauses as she searches below the soil for more to say and I sit with her for a few seconds in silence.

## **A SUMMARY OF SILENCE**

Ah, the sound of silence. We often assume it is the opposite of noise, and we cherish those moments in nature, home, or church when we can sit, be quiet, and reflect. Given how often we manage traffic, clutter, commercials, chatter, and noise—most of us long for the hush, shush, and noiselessness that come in bits and pieces throughout the day or week. However, when it comes to the lack of expression in verbal or written form from the human beings in our life—those silences are rarely neutral. We assign meaning to silence; in fact, silence has just as much connotation and richness as the spoken word. The problem we experience is never quite knowing what someone’s silence actually means.

Consider the boss’s silence in an important meeting. The team has collectively missed assigned deadlines on a significant reve-



nue-generating project, and the boss is not making eye contact and has not spoken for at least thirty minutes. Your colleagues continue to express and have all tossed out their ideas of what they believe the client wants and needs. We can all assume the silence coming from the chair of the boss is communicating something. Is he waiting until all the ideas are on the table or, is he too angry to speak?

What about the leader you have struggled to connect with for the past six months? She has been subtle with her criticism, and you cannot figure out what she expects. You worked very hard on a proposal and submitted it a week ago. It has been crickets chirping ever since. Why has she not responded? Too busy? Too indifferent? Is she punishing you? Her silence is sending a strong message—but which one?

When you bring home a new puppy, or you are raising a three-year-old, silence during their waking hours always suggests something terrible is on the verge of happening. We rush in to explore the root of this silence (often armed with paper towels). Then there are those never appreciated periods of silence after an argument with your spouse or partner. These stretches of time can last hours or days. We would have to be mighty foolish to assume the silence is neutral. It is most likely dripping with hurt, shame, anger, or perhaps all the above.

There are quotes all over the internet suggesting silence is a powerful scream. It is rarely empty but full of something. Silence is deadly; silence is dangerous; silence kills; silence cannot be misquoted. *Oh*, but it can!

As human beings, we are meaning-making creatures. We perceive and analyze in ways that are rarely the same between two people. Our silences may not communicate an impending death—although I have heard that no one plans a murder out loud. But the truth is—silence is never void of meaning and silences are always communicating something. The question we have to ask is whether our silences are intentional or unconscious. If they are deliberate, then what are we trying to convey and is the intended receiver of our silences picking up on the correct meaning? If our

silences are unconscious, we have an even greater opportunity for miscommunicating. In a leadership role, this can be hazardous.

Researchers have explored the concept of silence from a communication, cultural, and gender perspective. There are at least twenty different potential meanings of silence that include agreement, disagreement, sulking, fear, uncertainty, and awe.<sup>1</sup> All these various meanings and interpretations suggest we need to give the concept of silence far more respect and attention than perhaps we have imagined is necessary. We need to understand the *distinctions* of silence and how they differ from what it means to feel silenced.

I love the word “distinctions”! I like to say it, and I want to think about ways I can develop and master new distinctions. A distinction suggests there is something contrasting between two similar things. Owners of distinctions are viewed as separate and excellent. Once we own a substantial distinction—we are more likely to call ourselves an expert in something.

When I married my husband Brad, I declared shortly after our nuptials that we should strive to become wine snobs. I envied people who could study, swirl, taste, and spit out a sip of white or red wine and then discuss the different flavors and substance of the grape. They owned a distinction. Brad happily obliged, and after lots of practice, he started picking out wine labels based on his memory of taste and quality. He quickly passed me by as he developed his distinctions with Zinfandel, Malbec, and Pinot Noir. I, unfortunately, could not build his same distinctions because my pallet did not pick up on the subtle differences in flavor. I love wine, but after twenty-plus years of responsible sampling, I still have limited distinctions. I will never be an expert.

My daughter is a musician and has played the piano since she was six years old. When she first began to play, I knew enough about music to tutor her, and I recognized when she played the wrong keys. I was holding an entry-level distinction with scales and music. Fast forward more than a decade, Grace can perform an advanced sonata over and over until she believes she has mastered the correct timing and rhythm. My husband and I just hear

the same song over and over, and do not notice much difference. We lack the distinctions she has built over the years. She has the expertise we are unable to match.

My best friend is an art instructor. She can look at a canvas that another instructor created and deconstruct the art strokes to teach it from scratch to a new class. She owns an artist's distinction. My oldest stepson majored in film studies. When he watches a movie, he picks up on camera angles and filming techniques that my brain is not trained to see. He studied and worked hard and now owns a distinction.

Sometimes we have natural distinctions, and we quickly pick up on things with ease. Other times we are limited in our ability based on physical or cognitive constraints. However, when it comes to the distinctions of voice and silence—everyone can own and develop these. It is not just available to those who have PhDs in human development or linguistics. Your use of voice and silence can mature as you pay attention to your choices and intention. I believe that every leader or aspiring leader must make this a priority. Distinctions within voice are fully covered in the following chapters. Before we can master voice, we must first understand what keeps us from voice. How are we using silence?

## DISTINCTIONS IN SILENCE

One way we develop a distinction is to create levels of understanding. For those who know wine, there are charts to describe PH or alcohol levels. Since I never established my much-envied wine distinction, my graph would probably be a continuum of how empty or full my glass is compared to the stress of my week. Near empty, or level one might be a concern (or panic); level two or half full is preservation; level three or full equals bliss. We like categories—it helps us make sense of our world.

A widely recognized category or continuum of listening is an oldie but goodie in Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, first published in 1989.<sup>2</sup> He outlined five levels of

listening. Levels one through four were described as being within one's own frame of reference. At the lowest level was ignoring; then pretending to listen; then selective listening; and finally, attentive listening. However, level 5 listening involves transitioning away from our own frame and entering into the other's frame of reference. Covey called this empathetic listening.

In 2009, the leadership coaches of the world embarked on deepening their expertise with client interactions and built on Covey's work by simplifying the five levels of listening back into three.<sup>3</sup> They reasoned that Covey's levels one and two were not true listening. The new level one was categorized as listening to respond, and the emphasis was on self. We ask questions to make sense of the situation, we listen so we know when to insert our opinion, and we tend to be focused on our own needs and judgments. This is not bad; it just means we are inward.

Level two listening is when we shift our awareness back to the other. We notice what they say, how they say it and can mirror it back to the other in a way that suggests we are very present and empathetic. We listen to understand.

Level three listening accesses a higher level of intuition that goes beyond what we hear or see. When we can listen at this level, we are paying as much attention to the environment, not as a distraction, but as another way of knowing. We pick up on energy, what is said or not said, and we trust all our senses. It is noted that expert musicians, comedians, and facilitators are at their best when they stay at level three. They can create a level of understanding not just for themselves, but for the other(s).

Listening and silence seem to go hand in hand, and yet they are different.

I have a good friend, Paul, who is a master of silence. He takes it all in, listens, smiles, nods, and occasionally expresses a "hmm" or an "aw." He says little but receives everything. He does not always make eye contact, but it is evident in his posture and presence that his silence is not quiet. When he does decide to speak, I lean in and listen; I call this the Silence that Connects.

There is no one definition to describe this type of mastery, and it certainly goes beyond the highest level of listening. According to the Enneagram, which is a model of the human psyche that profiles a typology of nine interconnected personality types, these individuals may be type “nine” and are best described as peace-makers.<sup>4</sup> In healthy states, they are emotionally stable, serene, accepting, and at ease with self and life. They are profoundly receptive and can be quiet, listen, and use silence as a way of connection. In 1974, a scholar named Johannesen compiled all the different meanings of silence. In his compilation, he would describe this meaningful type of silence as an empathic exchange or the companionship of a shared mood. When we are with people who use silence to connect, we feel heard without words, welcomed without invitation, and valued without measure. There is something reassuring when a leader possesses this type of mastery in silence—there is a powerful desire to emulate and follow. Queen Elizabeth II, General Colin Powell, Abraham Lincoln, Princess Grace of Monaco, and even Walt Disney possessed these qualities. When in healthy states of mind, they created peace in silence.

On the opposite extreme are those whose silence is marked by a sullenness or unexpressed anger. They exude an energy that suggests disagreement or resentment. Long ago, I heard someone describe resentment as your failure to honor a request that I never actually made. We can punish that perceived failure with the silent treatment. There is far different energy between the silence of deep reception in the first example and this silence of resentment; which I am calling the Silence that Separates.

The silent treatment can be more harming and violent than pure lashing out.<sup>5</sup> However, many see silence as taking the high road, or as Michelle Obama quipped during the 2017 presidential campaign, “When they go low, we go high.” It is a grand strategy that we argue is full of grace and dignity. But this approach can backfire when dealing with critical relationships. The silent treatment, even when brief, activates a part of the brain that detects physical pain. The psychological torture from ostracism can outlast

a bodily injury. Regardless of the recipient's personality or the sender's status, the silent treatment can inflict a great deal of invisible bruising. Most in leadership would not last long if they (a) regularly said hateful things to their direct reports or (b) caused physical bruises on the bodies of their employees. Yet leaders tend to use silence or silent treatment as a powerful weapon against those who disagree or fail to meet expectations. Sometimes those expectations are spoken, and often they are not.

I once worked with a female leader who was a master of the silent treatment. My team members and I would whisper that it was just a matter of taking turns. There was always at least one of us on her list of disapproval. She would handle us in similar ways. She would sit next to us at meetings versus across the table as it allowed her to avoid eye contact. Once in her seat, she tilted her chair in the opposite direction, so all you got was the literal cold shoulder. I remember being on the tail end of her disapproval but unable to help myself when she came to a meeting wearing a suit that I thought was pretty incredible. I told her shoulder that she looked nice, and it appeared everyone heard the compliment. The head of the table, several chairs away from me, agreed and echoed my praise. However, she did not look my way or acknowledge me.

When leaders use the silent treatment, it can be argued that they are trying to maintain a separation. They want to isolate themselves as it gives them a sense of enhanced status. This is not that dissimilar to a person of privilege looking down their nose at someone less fortunate. To speak words is below them. And yet, this behavior can be psychologically annihilating to another.

We describe these people as arrogant, icing others out, snobbish, condescending, pompous, haughty, conceited, nose-is-in-the-air (hope it doesn't rain)—you get the idea. When this behavior is demonstrated by a leader, there is an unspoken internal assumption. Their value is only maintained based on a sense of superiority. They have a (un)conscious belief system that to be worthwhile, they need to highlight the weakness in others. To show care or concern would mark them as vulnerable or drop their guard to an unacceptable level.

When we experience these behaviors from someone we are supposed to follow, there are several different things that can happen. Our first reaction is often surprise or shock, followed by angst and anger. We cannot seem to rationalize what just happened. We often move to a coping strategy of trying harder or showing a greater sense of compliance to feel re-accepted. If it works, we find ourselves behaving in more careful ways moving forward and often censoring voice or behaviors that could lead to repeated ostracism. If re-inclusion does not result from our overly cooperative action, we reach a place of resignation that can lead to alienation and feeling like we have no options.

Many of the women I interviewed for this research described the powerful ways in which non-verbal behavior from others caused immeasurable pain. A lack of eye contact, conversations going quiet when entering a room, mocking gestures, or feeling ignored for weeks on end were just a sample of things I heard expressed. These were silences that punished and isolated. Unfortunately, it is never quite clear how intentional the behavior is without the use of language.

As human beings, we do not need a lot of training to recognize the difference between the first example of receptive silence that is born from the desire to connect and the silence that is born in resentment or the need to isolate. Sometimes these silences are conscious and sometimes not. The first type of silence sends a message of love and acceptance. The second carries a message of exclusion. Yet, no words are used—just some simple “mms” or “ahs,” or slight shifts in the body. Silence is always full of meaning.

Between these two extreme categories, are many examples in between that fall into the category that I call the Silence that Confuses. Figure 1.1 demonstrates the spectrum.

What is missing in these categories is the level of awareness we bring to each type. I can be raptly attentive to something and lose all track of time—it is unconscious. I can also, with a great deal of skill, choose to avoid something that has made me angry. In truth, every one of these examples of silence can be used to an advantage or disadvantage. It requires a level of intentionality.

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## TYPES OF SILENCE



### Silence that Connects

- Intuitive and empathetic receptiveness
  - Meditative or pondering reflection
  - Rapt focused attention on something or someone
  - Level 2 or 3 listening
- 



### Silence that Confuses

- Personality / Preferences
  - Indecision / Uncertainty
  - Agreement / Disagreement
  - Pre-occupation (level 1 listening)
- 



### Silence that Separates

- Avoidance born out of fear
  - Silent treatment stemming from anger or resentment
  - Ostracism to maintain an enhanced status or to isolate
- 

**Figure 1.1. Types of Silence**



Although we all know how it can stink when a leader consistently operates at the lowest level of (self-centered) listening, we have to recognize that this stance can be necessary. There's no harm in listening in a self-centered way, especially when you find yourself in a new or frightening situation. When I am listening to a medical diagnosis, when I've just landed at a foreign airport, or when I am trying to itemize the water heater repair bill, I am not focused on anyone else. I have concern for myself. My questions and expressions will come from a place of self-interest or self-preservation. This is not a time for me to try to empathetically listen to the concerns of a physician, taxi driver, or repairman.

The problem is when leaders are not able to shift out of level one listening and consider what the other is saying. I would argue that leaders need to live primarily at level two listening—listen to understand and then with intention, shift to listening level one or three based on the conditions, people, and context of the situation.

However, when it comes to silence—staying too long in the silence that separates, or the silence that confuses, is dangerous. Ostracizing, giving the silent treatment, or avoiding are poor leadership moves if used with regularity. Although I would argue that when a leader uses them sparingly with good intention, they can be powerful.

Sometimes it is necessary to put distance between you and your peer group once you have been promoted to a leadership role. Other times, we need to do intentional isolation when we have an employee who is misbehaving. A little silent treatment to curb anger is not always a bad thing. We must have an awareness that we are choosing these behaviors. It is when we unconsciously engage in the silence that separates that can cause diminished leadership credibility and a lack of followers.

The problem with the silence that confuses is that it can rarely be interpreted without language. We do not need a roadmap to figure out the sting of the silence that separates. When I am icing out my husband for something that made me angry, he rarely wonders if my silence is a sign of agreement. Yeah, no, never! I imagine most of us are perceptive enough to know the silences

that separate are born out of negative feelings and not neutral ones.

The neutral silences in the category of confusion are when we let someone else do the talking, and we sit quietly at the table. The others involved may not know if our silence is agreement or disagreement. It can go either way.

Another example of the silence that confuses is when leaders have personalities that allow them access to a great deal of emotional evenness (another ability I do not have). It can be difficult to know what their silence means because we do not observe a range of emotion between positive or negative. Leaders may need to be more verbal when wrestling with difficult issues because, without language, their lack of expression may be perceived as indifference.

When leaders need time to think because they are indecisive or uncertain, this silence can be misinterpreted as a lack of skill or avoidance. When a new leader has just taken over a team and has a personality that leverages a lot of silence, this can be perplexing without explanation. The silence that confuses can cause a great deal of angst for followers when leaders fail to provide language that explains.

In my experience, the silence that confuses causes the most disruption. Leaders have a significant opportunity to leverage language and alleviate any misunderstanding stemming from their silence. They need to explain what might be causing their taciturn posture because it may not be obvious to anyone but them.

## **BREAKING SILENCE**

Just as silence never has only one meaning and categories are fundamental ways to make sense of the variables, there is also the distinction of *breaking* silence. This is a declarative act and typically results in some type of behavior change as a result of the expression. We are ending whatever silence has been used up to a certain point.

Some things should be discussed, but we choose not to do so, and this unspoken decision often results in what people deem as “breaking” once something is spoken. When we break the silence, we are sharing a secret that up until now has been “unspeakable.” It is the elephant in the room or the lump in the rug. We know it is there, but we do not speak of it. This “breaking” is less about silence and more about breaking a norm of unspoken agreement that something should remain a secret; stay in the dark, out of sight; out of focus, and at some level accepted.

In 2006, Tarana Burke, a civil rights activist, coined the phrase *Me Too* on the Myspace social network to bring awareness to women of color in underprivileged communities who were experiencing sexual abuse. Fast forward to 2017; the hashtag “MeToo” went viral when elite players in Hollywood and politics came forward to accuse men in power of sexual misconduct. When a woman tweeted or posted a story with #MeToo, they were breaking their silence and sharing their secret of how they were on the receiving end of sexual harassment or abuse. In January 2018, the research firm GfK (Growth from Knowledge) conducted a 2,000-person nationally representative survey on sexual harassment and assault. They concluded that 81 percent of women and 43 percent of men experienced some form of sexual harassment or assault in their lifetime. Media picked up on this research and reported that most women and almost half of all men are going to experience some form of sexual misconduct.<sup>6</sup>

As more people come forward and share their experience with this phenomenon, it creates space and safety for others. Once someone breaks the norm and speaks, others are likely to follow. However, how silence is broken is critical. The breaking can lead to, (a) deep and meaningful conversations that shift societal norms of conduct, (b) continued silence that separates, or (c) it can lead to a sense of normalizing the experience. Because it happens to just about everyone—it is a part of life, and the conversation is no longer about shifting norms but adopting behaviors to manage. The language we use when breaking silence around something unspeakable becomes as critical as the decision to speak.

Some may argue that this level of discernment should not be needed to speak. I disagree—especially if you are in a leadership role. Be clear on your intention and your objective before you break the silence. The higher the level of awareness we bring to our secret sharing, the higher the degree of success we will have in shifting conversations and creating change. The secret does not always speak for itself with success.

It is also true that having a secret can cause us to feel silenced. We want to share, and we have definite objectives and sincere hopes for change, but for multiple reasons, we do not think we can express. This leads to the last distinction and the foundation of what this book is about—the silenced. Not every silenced person holds a secret, but what they do carry is a desire to express. They have language, ideas, motivations, and a willingness to speak, lead, and communicate.

## THE SILENCED

Why bother with reviewing the different meanings of silence? *Because! Because! Because!* Without these distinctions, we cannot truly understand what it means to feel silenced. The silence that connects, the silence that confuses, and the silence that separates are all demonstrated through non-verbal behavior. We are behaving. Whether we are aware of it or not, consciously or unconsciously, we use our bodies, our eyes, and our intuition when we communicate with silence. It is never absent of meaning.

If we accept the notion that silence communicates and silence is never void of meaning, then we also have to agree that we can learn and adopt behaviors that leverage our use of silence. We can use our agency. We can choose how we listen, and we can decide how we use silence. This is what it means to be our own agent. We are at choice.

To feel silenced is different.

To make sense of the silenced female leader and the stories from the women in this book, we have to appreciate what it means

to be our own agents of change. When we are at choice, we can see that we have up to eighty different options available to us at any given time. It means I have a choice in how I use language and how I use silence. I can speak, or I can be quiet; I can participate, or I can abstain; I can stay, or I can leave. When women are feeling silenced, they perceive their options as taken away.

Feeling silenced is a way of showing up in life. It is not always about behavior or choice. Instead, the person's way of being in the world shifts. In academia, we use the word "ontology," which means the nature of being. When a woman in leadership feels silenced, her way of being changes. The movement is slow and subtle, but eventually, she will become aware of it and wonder, *Who have I become? How did I get so far off track? How do I become me again?*



I eye the basket of toys on her shelf and consider reaching for one as I wait. As a researcher, I have become more comfortable with the awkward starts and stops as executive women try to explain to me what it is like for them to feel silenced and how they manage not being a silencer of others. On this particular spring day in May 2016, the silence is so pregnant with meaning that I hold the heavy quiet until she leans forward and speaks to me again.

"None of us are whole or perfect. We all carry these damn invisible backpacks!"

She shifts between animation and reflection as she describes what it means to have power as a leader but feels powerless while still having a title. "Power is real, and we don't all have it. And we don't all have it consistently. We have to think purposefully about when we silence, in particular, women. We have to think about how that harms."



## 2

### WHO IS SHE?

*I began to learn that I needed to go into every situation with armor on—assuming that I would be attacked. I had to be ready to defend myself rather than being collaborative and open and, you know, furthering the company. It really was armoring every day.*

—Marketing Executive

**I** ring the doorbell and stand on a well-manicured porch. I hear the sounds of workers inside the home mingled with a dog barking. She answers the door dressed in a sweatshirt, jeans, and comfortable shoes. The women in my research have agreed to meet me in many different places—homes, corner offices, restaurants, coffee shops, and virtual workspaces. I have driven to other states to hear their stories, and I have transcribed hundreds of hours of interviews. From California to the Philippines—the silenced female leader has raised her hand upon hearing about my research. As a writer and social scientist, I have many problems. Finding women to talk to me about their experience with silencing is not one of them. Hands raised so quickly; I struggled to respond to every interested participant. When I replied and asked for an interview, I often heard positive exclamations—a sense they were chosen. They were going to be heard.

Kris is a marketing executive with two master's degrees and a background that includes start-ups and experience working for a major American multinational information technology company headquartered in California. As I set up for the interview, we meet in her study and are joined by her lap dog. Her furry canine looks at me with those dewy dog eyes that make most people feel gooey inside. There have been several dogs glued to their human moms during interviews. They sensed the conversation was essential and believed they were needed. It was indeed true this particular afternoon.

As was my custom, I launched into a logistical explanation of my research and began with a background question after clicking the button on my recording device. This particular leader entered into the conversation with a genuine readiness. It was almost like she was desperate for me to ask her the right question as no one else had yet. She had a story to share, and my first two questions turned her faucet to a steady pour. Her eyes teared up before she could get her entire background stated for the record. Like many other women I meet and interview, the emotion from silencing cannot always be contained. When someone tugs on the right string, the body responds in multiple ways.



There are lots of ways we silence each other. I can interrupt someone mid-sentence or gesture in a way that cuts someone off. I can talk over, occasionally make another person's idea one of my own, or be sarcastic in a way that shuts someone up. In our excitement, carelessness, anger, or state of being fallible human beings—we silence each other. Most of the time, we shake it off, laugh at it, roll our eyes, get over it, and move on. Such is life, and we learn early, not everyone is a good listener, and not everyone is interested in our thoughts and opinions. These small occurrences or one-offs do not change the way we are in the world. They do not cause our existence to shift as I spoke about in chapter 1. I can



still be my genuine self with my authentic voice after someone accidentally, or even intentionally, silences me.

The silencing that causes a change in how we are in the world, that causes us to show up as silenced, versus just a little ticked, is what I call viral silencing. When we experience an egregious event or patterns of micro-aggressive behavior over prolonged periods, it gets deep into our system and can permeate or spread. Micro-aggression can come in the form of a statement, action, or incident that may be regarded as indirect, subtle, or unintentional. Comments can be benign on the surface but be discriminatory and painful deep inside. This pervasive penetration if not mitigated, shifts our thinking, feelings, spirit, health, and leadership. We feel silenced, act silenced, and our systems and domains are compromised.

In our earnestness to understand things in life, people will often oversimplify. When I have presented the topic of female leadership silencing at conferences, attendees sometimes ask questions like, “Is this about a lack of confidence?” Or, “What’s the difference between feeling silenced and feeling bullied?” And my favorite (. . . *not really*), “Are these women behaving like victims?” The answer to that last question is a resounding NO!

The other questions of what this may be similar to or different from gets back to understanding distinctions. Sometimes things can look very much alike but be different. Yes, of course, there are elements of confidence at play, but this is not just about building confidence. Sometimes it can be about bullying—but not always. So, before I say more about what it means to be a silenced leader, let me explain what it is not.

## **NOT A VICTIM MINDSET**

Some people enjoy playing the victim and like the idea of being rescued. We all know these people, and collectively, our tolerance for their behavior diminishes over time. A damsel cannot really be saved if she enjoys her distress too much.

In case you are wondering, there are no damsels in this book or my research. The women I studied were not choosing a victim mindset and believing everyone else was at fault. Participants at times did describe feelings of victimization as a result of silencing, but the last thing they wanted to do was stay in this mindset and operate from that space. I have never met women more eager to be successful and authentic at the same time.

As a society, I believe we have lost sight of what it means to be a victim. A victim is someone whose rights are violated; someone who is injured or harmed. Sometimes it is a crime, or often it is an encounter that leaves a psychological injury. Victims do not choose it, see it coming, or welcome it. When we are victims of something—this is not a sign of weakness.

There will always be that one—or perhaps a few—who are empathy and rescue-seekers. I am sure some women who are silenced may relish and roll around in the victim mindset. However, it is habitually wrong to believe or suggest that women are bringing on this silencing condition and are using it to their advantage.

## **BULLYING**

Feeling silenced is not just about getting bullied. Not every silencer fits the profile of what we have come to know as a typical bully. A bully is a person who uses strength or power to harm or intimidate those perceived as weaker. In professional settings, many can find themselves feeling bullied by the silent (cold shoulder) treatment, having their time disrespected, or having their work sabotaged and unacknowledged. This behavior can undoubtedly lead to viral silencing, but there is more to it than just bullying.

The women in this research described their silencers as often unknowing. Sometimes it was intentional and done by people with perceived power. Other times, women felt silenced by group dynamics and systems that were incessantly bold but unconscious. We cannot say to women in leadership who feel silenced, “Hey,

just address this like an adult bully and put distance between you and them, stop acting like a victim, and take a stand.” That approach is too simple! When you are in an executive role surrounded by leadership complexity, it is a disservice to provide quick tips and advice that may work in specific examples but not all.

## CONFIDENCE

Women in leadership will undoubtedly experience a dip—but this is not just about a loss of confidence. Yes, that happens when someone feels silenced, and I would argue that the women in my research described the loss as a symptom but not the whole of the experience. Kay and Shipman describe confidence as a matter of choice—it is volition. In their book, *The Confidence Code: The Science and Art of Self-Assurance—What Women Should Know*, they describe confidence-building habits and how genetics may play a part.<sup>1</sup> Just as everything is not always about silencing, it is equally valid that everything is not always about confidence. When we are confident, we believe in our capability. There is a sense of trust or certainty in the truth of something.

I can be extremely confident in one area of my life and be lacking in another. In theory, confidence builds through repetition and encouragement. The more I write or speak on a topic; my confidence grows. The more I train for a marathon (so not me), my confidence in my stamina increases.

Sometimes we need an entire confidence makeover, and sometimes it is fine-tuning. I see a lot of young people entering the workforce and leadership with ingrained confidence. They have not had too many setbacks yet to question their ability. They charge forward with eagerness and confidence that is primarily based on the encouragement of others and their self-talk. When they hit that first setback, often they just need to rebuild in the area they experienced failure. Practice, training, or development is required.

When it comes to being an executive leader—who gets to practice? Unfortunately, rehearsal time is over! I do not know many executives who get a lot of do-overs if they say the wrong thing in a meeting or make the wrong high-stakes decision. Every choice is scrutinized, and every behavior matters. There is no test environment before you go live, and lower levels of leadership are not always preparing women for what they encounter in executive roles.<sup>2</sup>

The women in my research had varying degrees of confidence, and it did not always shift their experience when silenced. In fact, women with a strong sense of self-confidence were sometimes the hardest hit. They were stunned by silencing when it occurred and often did not know how to respond. Had someone just given them advice on increasing their confidence—it would have missed the mark. Sometimes all the confidence in the world will not save you from the curveballs of silencing.

Silencing is complex. When someone experiences viral silencing, they may feel victimized, bullied, *and* feel a dip in confidence. It is rarely just one of these things. It can be all three or more. What follows is a summary of what it is like to feel pervasively silenced. This describes the history of dozens of women I interviewed. I listened to over 100 hours of women describing their experience. From those interviews, I have captured a general summary. This description is intended to give insight into what it is like so that when you put down this book, you will have a better understanding.

This summary is not intended to represent every woman's path, and some things are real for most but not all.

## HER PROFILE

When a female leader feels silenced, she perceives herself as lacking in personal agency.

My sister is a successful real estate agent in Texas. She represents buyers and sellers in the transaction of property. Agency is a

term suggesting that one can produce or act on behalf of self or others. As described in chapter 1, it includes an individual's ability to make choices and then to make meaning from those available selections. One person may see few options in their circumstances, whereas another individual in that same situation may see multiple options. On a basic level, we are all our own agents. I can represent myself in any transaction I choose to be part of, or I can have someone be my agent.

Silenced female leaders often feel they are no longer entirely an agent of self when it comes to their leadership. Here are some examples of things I heard in interviews: An executive at a prestigious school district said, "I had nowhere to go. I mean nowhere." A CEO of her own company put her silencing experience this way, "Being in situations where you can't do anything about it; it's such a helpless feeling." A senior director in a nonprofit said this about her silencing, "I did not feel empowered in any way."

This sensation is a paradox given the inherent authority in a senior leadership role. What does it really mean to be an executive yet feel like you have no options? How do women make sense of the sensation of being a leader but feel there are limited choices when it comes to decision making? From the outside, this rarely makes sense. However, for women in it—and for many of my readers—you know what this is like, and it is hard to explain, and exceptionally painful to experience.

Participants described the phenomenon of feeling silenced with various metaphors, which are figures of speech that go beyond pure intellect; they expand insight. If someone says, "I'm trying to run in quicksand," it conjures up sensations. It suggests a new way of understanding the concept of feeling stuck. I once asked my CPA husband to respond to the running in quicksand metaphor with a quick reaction. Without overthinking it, he replied that he felt mucky and trapped. I believe that takes *stuck* or "I can't seem to get anything accomplished," to a different level. Different word choices create more profound understanding and empathy.

When I interviewed women about their experiences with silencing, I never asked them for a metaphor. I just asked them to tell me about a time they felt silenced in their leadership role. I would follow up their answers with a question to explain how it felt. The metaphors came without prompts.

The consistent theme across all metaphors was the perceived lack of agency; I am without choice!

The most used metaphors fell into three categories: (a) Fighting, War, Games, and Clubs, (b) Isolation and Death, (c) Body, Heart, and Soul. There were other metaphors used, but these three were consistent across multiple interviews. Let me share some examples.

## **FIGHT CLUB**

As long as I have been an active member of the workforce, I have heard and at times used game or war metaphors to describe work. We talk about losing battles to win wars. Or we discuss what chess moves to make next. We are all guilty of saying things like, “play to win” or “fight fair.” It is often unconscious and a way to relate to both genders. Sports, games, and war analogies are laced throughout our English language.

The silenced female leader has taken her language and metaphor up a notch. Her descriptions go beyond the benign examples we find in everyday organizations or teams. She refers to her role or her organization as a game she cannot win. She will fight to feel heard, fight to get work accomplished, or fight to have an equal voice at the table. The concept of the “fight” is prevalent. Male dominance is named as a barrier to her success, and she may have to fight the “good-ol’-boys club.” Fighting to be heard suggests a struggle with voice, and when that fight reaches a certain threshold, women lose their sense of agency.

## ISOLATION AND DEATH

The second theme from the research is the metaphor of dying and isolation. Here, silenced women describe their organization, industry, or environment in multiple life-and-death terms. She may mention that when she is not fighting, it feels that she is being eaten alive, crushed, or strangled on the vine.

She may equate her silencing experience to suffocation, strangulation, drowning, or being out on a limb all alone. Each silencing encounter is described as a form of poison that slowly erodes her sense of self. Her language may include references to her heart, soul, mind, and body. She refers to heartbreak and bone-crushing pain. She protects herself by putting on a metaphoric armor, and she tries to develop a thick skin—this phenomenon of feeling silenced bleeds into all her domains.

## GIVE A LITTLE BIT OF HEART AND SOUL

The last category is her description of her body when she feels silenced. Body, heart, and soul include stories that give a more in-depth insight into the impact of silencing. For instance, a senior faculty member at a university stated, “I refer to that time as living with sandpaper on my soul.” I’ve heard women describe heart-sickness, heartbreak, along with soul-dying, and body-trampling pain when silenced. These are not random experiences that leave this sensation, but ongoing, continuous periods.

My real estate-selling sister is three years older, and I idolized her as a teenager. I remember blasting TPau’s 1987 song, “Heart and Soul,” in her brown Chevette the summer after her freshman year of college. I would sing the lyrics about giving a little but not begging for love in the process.

I believe at the root of my being that leadership is a call for courage, heart, and soul. We have to be somewhat in love with the purpose that calls for our leadership, and when we lose our heart, we can begin to feel like beggars.

So, who are these villains and silencers who would evoke metaphors of fights, death, isolation, and loss of heart or soul? I would love to paint them as dark felons who relish in criminal behavior. I wish it were that simple or true—because then we could put them in a category that we believe they belong and turn the key.

## THE SILENCERS

I imagine without much analysis, there are several people who come to mind as silencers. Elite players in Hollywood, politicians, and the wealthy well-connected privileged are often the accused and the convicted. It only takes a few casual glances at a news broadcast to be aware of powerful men who silence women with non-disclosure agreements, settlements, and career-limiting threats or actions.

The female leaders in my research did not describe their silencers in this same vein.

Instead, they view their silencers as sometimes intentional but mostly subtle, unknowing, but incessant. They include people, systems, and even themselves. Women experience silencing through the non-verbal opportunism of bosses or peers, primarily when they emphasize written communication over face-to-face conversations. Others may fail to give eye contact or may mock with eye rolls when they speak. Women experience the silence that separates with the silent treatment that can come in the form of people being non-responsive to emails or requests. Female leaders can be excluded from meetings by not getting invitations to attend or even worse, getting uninvited. In more extreme circumstances, silencers may be physical. They can fist-pump the table, be rough with chairs, raise their voices, or slam doors to show their disapproval.

Individuals will also silence her with verbal criticism and control. She is the recipient of dismissive comments that question her expertise based on her gender, race, or her role in the organization. She is criticized privately, publicly, and in extreme cases



through random acts of nonviolent behavior—like smearing messages in satisfaction surveys or quite literally on bathroom walls. Despite her role as an executive leader, she is on the receiving end of command-and-control leadership from either her supervisor or in some cases, the board of directors. She notices everything. She sees others conspiring against her and may feel thinly harassed. At times, she will need to ward off more overt sexual advances or public shaming, but that is typically not the norm for women in executive roles. Sexual advances are more prevalent at lower levels of leadership or perhaps when she is starting her career. However, unlike lower levels of leadership, she does not always have a place to take her concerns or complaints when something unpardonable does occur.

As she navigates silencing behavior from individuals, she is also silenced by systems of privilege. Here her silencers are faceless and represent dominant male behavior demonstrated by both genders. Systems of privilege may also favor personal characteristics, like a style of leadership or affiliations that are based on preferred groups, credentials, or roles. If she has those characteristics and associations, she may experience inclusion.

It does not matter if you are five years old on the playground, the new hire in your first professional role, or an executive sitting in a c-suite—exclusion is always painful regardless of an achieved or perceived level of success.

Exclusion can also occur if her speech or patterns of communication are misaligned with the dominant discourse in her organization. Merely speaking up or out is rarely the solution as raising voice does not indicate voice efficacy and can at times increase her difficulty. Her lack of consciousness around this issue with voice is one of the first barriers she needs to address.

Her silencers are young, old, and the same age. They are same-sex, heterosexual, male, and female. They are Black and White and inclusive of all nationalities, cultures, and religions. When there is no one around to silence her, she may silence herself and further decrease her care of self. When she self-silences, she has a perceived locus of control that is outside herself. This shows up as

an external threat and can cause internal fear, self-questioning, and shifts in effective leadership. She responds to that threat and fear with self-protection. She is unwilling to speak or act if it jeopardizes vital work relationships or her standing with her organization. Often, she is the breadwinner in her family and has bills, responsibilities, and a lifestyle to maintain. She may actively suppress her thoughts, believing there is no room for error or expression.

## **COGNITIVE COMPROMISE**

When she feels silenced, it feels like she has contracted a virus. The silencing virus affects her cognition, emotion, spirit, and body. Cognitively it is like being in a mental spin, and she struggles with confusion on why things are so challenging. She replays conversations and situations in her head until she cannot think. Kris, the marketing executive, described it as “thinking something to death before I spoke up.”

She also suffers from deficit thinking and questions her leadership decisions. Here we see evidence of confidence surfacing in this phenomenon. Deficit thinking differs from a mental spin in that the deficit is specific to her leadership ability. Here participants described their lack of self-assurance, questioned their ability to lead, and described a sensation of overall failure that trespassed into domains beyond their leadership role. Women wrestle with imposter syndrome and feel a lack of trust in self and others. An executive for a chain of casual restaurants in the United States who had decades of success, only to experience silencing by her CEO later in her career, put it this way, “All I know is from that point on, I wasn’t willing to show up freely as myself the way I think I have been.”

## EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

Emotionally she experiences a sense of isolation where she feels disconnected from her peers (if she has them) and those she is required to lead. The word “isolation” refers to the idea of remaining alone. One is separate or apart from others. The viral nature of feeling silenced induces a sense that one is not worthy of being part of the whole. Participants in my research reference both their voice and their silence as creating isolation. I vividly remember my physician turned executive describe her leadership silencing isolation as forced internment. That’s a hefty metaphor! Internment is the state of being confined as a prisoner—more often for political reasons. Another executive who chose to retire at an early age from her executive role describes her experience this way:

Well I know what made me want to leave, it was the feeling of separation and loneliness. I didn’t really share how I felt with anybody because at the time I suppose it came up [as] shame. Now I would look back on it with some understanding. I think the feeling of separateness and isolation [is] that you can’t be who you are.

Another aspect of emotional distress is the sense of feeling traumatized by silencers. Here, I heard women use words like misery and mental abuse. Consider Lindsey, who was hired into a senior role by a female leader who vacated the position into a higher executive role. Lindsey’s approach to running the work was aligned with the organization’s mission, purpose, and values, but different than her female boss who held the role prior. She began to feel that all her leadership moves and decisions were measured against what her boss would have done. She felt strongly criticized and verbally rebuked for having a different style and approach but the intent to reach the same outcomes.

I kind of felt like I was going into abuse situations. I would wonder how I could put protections around myself. My husband—he just wanted me to get out. He would try to name it

as domestic violence. I did not want to get out. I wanted to work my way through it.

This sense of trauma and abuse may feel extreme, but several women described it as something real but unspoken. They saw it not only impacting their leadership and role within the organization but also their sense of self at home and with their families. A nursing director in healthcare put it this way:

This mental trauma stays with you forever because I'm fearful; I don't want that time to repeat. Even in this current role, I'm very cautious. I do use my voice, but I know when to silence it because I know that I don't want to go back to that. It takes a long time to recover from previous silence and trauma.

Beyond the trauma, there is a sense of emotional vulnerability and anxiety that can lead to shame and depression. As one might expect, these emotions can lead to tearful outbursts that rarely are welcomed. Women described times they cried at work with regret and anger as they believed their demonstrations of emotion further weakened their ability to be seen as competent leaders.

I do not know a single person alive who relishes being in the space of this type of vulnerability. Cognitively, we know that vulnerability is needed for growth, but we prefer safety, assurance, and strength. Ultimately vulnerability means to be susceptible, open to attack, or being wounded. Vulnerability is a concept that has surfaced in organizational studies. There is research to suggest that managers feel a strong need to avoid embarrassment, threat, and feelings of vulnerability or incompetence. They may avoid anything that suggests weakness or that might raise questions about their current courses of action. The studies on management perception argue that leaders may silence their employees to avoid vulnerability.<sup>3</sup> However, my research shows vulnerability differently; participants did not feel at risk with their employees as much as they did their peer group or boss.

For example, an executive working at a school district describes her experience after a male peer, who silenced her, left the organization. “I felt like as a leader; I was diminished. I’m a very efficacious person, and I can go back, and I can regroup, and I can get myself moving forward again. Even a year after he left, I was still unable to do that.”

A CEO I interviewed who felt silenced by multiple systems and relationships said this, “I’ve been in therapy every time I change a job and now consistently because I can get depressed pretty easy. . . . And I can’t let that happen to my spirit.”

Despite the source of silencing, every participant in my research described some aspect of feeling vulnerable when silenced. Many women cried during the interview as they recounted their experience. Their tears were an expression of their vulnerability, as well as the emotional pain they experienced. Thus, this overall sense of vulnerability goes beyond attempts to conceal a lack of knowledge or maintain competence. Rather, it is indicative of the viral effect of silencing.

As a reader, you may think that perhaps every single one of my research participants are sensitive women who tend to overuse emotional language and metaphors to exaggerate. I analyzed the language orientation of my contributors. I studied the transcripts to determine how many times they used cognitive oriented words such as “I think,” or “I thought,” or “I believe.” I compared that to the women who used more emotional language like, “I feel,” or “I felt.” Based on the text, 80 percent of them were more cognitive in their choices than emotional. I also found myself having to ask them to tell me how it felt. Their initial reactions were first to express their thinking and belief system. I had to specifically ask (sometimes more than once), “How did it feel to be silenced?” before I could get emotional responses.

Thus, we can put to rest the bias that women who experience silencing in leadership are more sensitive or emotional. This is not true. The focus on specific word choice gives insight into how cognition and emotion drive perceptions. Women did not always lean in with a strong feeling-orientation language that assumed an

empathetic mind-set. Instead, the language choices they used suggested a strong thinking orientation (that we often expect from leaders), which implies a logical, practical, and critical-minded approach.

## SPIRITUAL LOSS

Beyond cognition and emotion, women may be spiritually shrouded in the sense of loss of self. She feels disconnected from her core, the idea of who she is wired to be in this world, and often senses a void in her being or soul. She may feel trampled, misplaced, and without an anchor.

Not every woman I spoke to about her experience of feeling silenced shared a spiritual impact. Some were atheists, others were devout in their chosen faith, and the rest nested somewhere in between. As a social scientist, I was not investigating their religious beliefs. Instead, I was interested in their level of consciousness and their way of knowing. Consciousness is a challenging topic to study. It can be as simple as being awake, or as complicated as being aware of ourselves and aware of the world. As far back as 1842, scholars have been attempting to categorize all the ways we know or the way we sense. In 1983, Wagner, who was influenced by the psychological consciousness work of all the smart minds preceding him, identified four elements of the self. The material-self is comprised of what we own. The social-self is what others notice. There is an ego-self, which is our sense of identity and sameness. Last, there is the spiritual-self—our inner being.<sup>4</sup>

How did each woman's *inner being* change as a result of feeling silenced? Based on my interviews, at least half described some loss of inner self. In my linguistic analysis, the internal loss was not specific to losing a job, a relationship, or anything tangible. Some language examples include, "I lost contact with the heart part of me." Or, "I found myself losing my connection to myself," and, "There was so much of me that I lost." Another powerful example from an executive who opted out of leadership to become a coach

said, “Well, the first thing that comes to me is, I just think I kind of withdrew my personhood.” Last an African American executive working at a global engineering company said it this way:

From a spiritual standpoint, I felt like I kind of lost my way. That I didn't have that grounding. That thing that kind of kept me steady just felt off, you know? I felt like I was less sure of what I needed to be doing and who I was.

While some named their spirit as suffering, others found solace in their spiritual practices. This, in turn, created a way for them to heal slowly. Using spiritual practices to manage and move to voice is integrated into many strategies women use to manage silencing.

Additionally, many women interviewed described their search for something to fill the void when they were silenced, and this often led to some physical ramifications that are covered in the next chapter.

In summary, the silenced are not just bullied, lacking in confidence, or behaving like victims. They may feel victimized; they may be on the receiving end of a bully's power, and they certainly experience shifts in confidence when they are silenced. This dynamic goes beyond one encounter and one dip in certainty. When women feel consistently and egregiously silenced—they change. This change does not just impact them on a cognitive, emotional, or spiritual level. When a female leader experiences pervasive silencing, she will also experience it at a physical level.

## **THE BODY KEEPS SCORE**

I was thankful to have a recording device in each interview as it allowed me to settle into a deep sense of level three listening and the silence that connects. Kris shared stories with me that day in her home office that left me a bit shaken. “Carrie, I really tried to roll that boulder uphill.” She went on to tell me about her debilitating headaches and her ultimate decision to opt out of the organ-

ization that caused tremendous silencing. As I closed the interview, she shared with me how interested she was in learning more about the research. She felt it was a topic that many felt alone in, and the isolation needed to stop.



### 3

## FEELING SILENCED CAN MAKE YOU SICK!

*Feeling silenced manifests into all kinds of different health issues. If I chose to stay silent, actually, I think I would have been dead. I think it would have killed me. Because I was able to find my voice, that's actually what kept me alive, and it kept me going.*

—Construction Company Chief Operating Officer

Joyce and I met at a restaurant, and it was clear within minutes of sitting down to conduct the interview, that she was someone I would love to call a friend. She had a presence about her and an ability to use silence and listen at expert levels. Joyce asked me smart questions about the research, my plans, and what I hoped to learn. She engaged with a sense of openness and curiosity that made it hard for me to believe she had ever suffered from the extreme forms of silencing she would soon disclose.

As a free thinker, Joyce was consistently rewarded for her ability to challenge systems and find new ways of approaching her work. She had a track record of success with several promotions—some included being on political cabinets. She was often the only woman in the roles she held or the only female at the table. However, when she landed at the executive table, things changed. “The

understanding was once you get to a senior vice president position, reporting to the CEO, essentially I was told be a good soldier, shut up, and just follow along.”

I asked Joyce to share with me the emotional and physical impact of feeling silenced. These are her words.

It felt awful, demoralizing. I questioned my own leadership abilities, that maybe I wasn't an effective leader. I knew I was being undermined. It affected me mentally because I started questioning everything I was doing. I'd question it too much. Health-wise it took its toll. I ended up with massive ulcers in my stomach, my esophagus, and in my intestinal tract. I probably gained sixty pounds in about four years. Then when I was on a flight, my stomach tore. I was rushed to the hospital. I lost a third of my stomach, three-fourths of my intestinal tract. My esophagus was a wreck. I ended up having everything rebuilt. There was a good chance that I wasn't going to survive. They put me back together.



How does a woman go from a successful career with promotions, a strong following, and a track record of success to feeling like a failure on the verge of death? An even more important question, how does one get put back together again? What are the steps in that process?

Recently I was reviewing a call for papers that the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* posted. As of April 2018, they were collecting research to publish a special report on stress and health. The guest editors say this in their request: “We know a lot about the causes of stress but much remains unknown about the progression from stress to illness or how we assess and explain this process.”<sup>1</sup>

They go on to request multiple perspectives on the concept of recovery and welcome empirical, theoretical, laboratory, field-work, and new methodologies to make sense of this dynamic of stress and health. Embedded in their quest for research is my

same question. How does one return to a preexisting baseline of normalcy after experiencing deep psychological stress? I promise you, it is not a quick vacation to a sunny location—rarely is that a lasting cure.

This journal is just one of the hundreds that focus on the concepts of stress and health. From the fatigue of healthcare workers caring for the sick, to bus drivers getting yelled at by their riders, to the stress of combat or preparing for deployment, we want to understand the causes of occupational stress on wellness. Researchers continue to wrestle with nuances and how to measure and correlate what we intrinsically know is happening—that stress makes people sick.

Dr. Sharon Horesh Bergquist is a physician, teacher, and researcher at Emory University. She has a short Ted-Ed video with over 2 million views that boils down how stress affects the body. She explains how stress triggers our adrenal glands to release the hormones cortisol, adrenaline, and norepinephrine. Cortisol messes with our blood vessels, and if there is no return to a healthy baseline, it can increase the risk of heart attack or stroke. Unnecessary adrenaline links to higher blood pressure and heart rate that can cause nervousness and ultimately heart damage. Norepinephrine is a stress hormone that can cause sleeplessness, loss of libido, gastrointestinal problems, and potential disease resistance.<sup>2</sup>

These hormones in healthy doses help the body regulate and stay alive, but like anything overused, they can be damaging. Stress can shift levels in the body and tilt the equilibrium needed for a healthy routine like breathing, digestion, vision, and rest. We do not require extensive research to know stress makes us sick. What we need is to understand the triggers of stress, how stress may muffle or suppress us, and what our healthy preexisting baseline looks like so we can find a way back.

I argue that a healthy preexisting baseline, first and foremost, is having agency and voice!

The stress of silencing and the silencing of stress is cyclical and hidden. Part of the cure is to shed light on this phenomenon and bring it out in the open, so it loses its potency on our brains,

hearts, and bodies. This chapter covers some of the ways feeling silenced hits the body like a virus.

## THE SILENCING VIRUS CAUSES PHYSICAL PAIN

The pain is real, and it is physical. The majority of women I spoke to were able to describe how silencing impacted them physically. Before everyone begins to assume that silencing and disease in some regions of the body are directly correlated, let me clarify that I never had two participants explain their physical symptoms in the same way. Instead, I saw patterns. The pattern was breath, digestion, and overall body pain.

I did not lead women to these answers. As a researcher, my job is to ask open-ended questions and see what emerges. So, for instance, I asked, “How did feeling silenced impact you physically?” Here are some of the things I heard that were specific to breathing or the throat.

“My throat would constrict in situations like that. That’s a real interesting physical response to silencing when your voice doesn’t come out,” said an education executive.

A highly accomplished attorney told me, “I hold the pain in my throat, right here [pointing to her voice box], and I try to keep my voice even; I try not to cry.”

Another executive in healthcare said, “[gasp] Oh, I get that Globus Hystericus. It is painful—it is chest and throat. I mean, it just hurts. It’s funny that it hurts physically. It’s the weirdest thing.”

Let me pause here and talk about this Globus Hystericus, which is the medical definition of having a lump in your throat. The “lump” in most cases is not physical; it feels like a lump, but there is nothing actually there. If there is a palpable lump, it is often mucus that is cleared with coughing. The fake lump is emotion causing a genuine impression of physical swelling or tightening in the throat or chest. Romance authors love to describe the groom as having this sensation. He waits for his bride to walk

down the aisle, and his eyes well with tears as he swallows the lump in his throat upon seeing his soulmate make her way toward him. I have never read a book that said the groom had to gulp his *Globus Hystericus*, or if we are literal—his glob of snot.

This *Globus*, otherwise known as a globe or sphere, can be painful. It can sit precisely in the spot that our vocal cords reside and if we feel psychologically silenced, it makes sense that this part of the body might experience a physical manifestation. However, this is not the romantic phenomenon we experience at weddings. For some women, this can be a painfully regular and consistent occurrence in the body.

If an aching lump in the throat is at one spectrum, the other end holds things such as severe bronchitis, pneumonia, mononucleosis, tracheal stenosis, thyroid disease, and various respiratory ailments. We have to remember that two essential bodily functions are reliant on the small channels in our neck. We swallow food, and we breathe air. If we hold stress in that part of the body, we are likely to experience some adverse impact with those functions. Another participant, who is a hospital CEO, shared this regarding her issues with breath.

I still get it; it's when I'm stressed. And I have asthma, so I always wonder when I lay in bed, is this asthma? I can't take a deep inhale, and so I went in to see my physician, and he said it was stress. When I felt trapped in that [silencing], one of the physical manifestations was my body just wasn't even functioning right.

I had one particular participant who was an executive in finance talk to me about how silencing would literally take her breath away. It was incomprehensible that her peers could treat her with such disdain or with such marginalizing behavior. She explained that not only did it feel like a punch to the gut, it also often felt hard to breathe. She would catch herself engaging in shallow breathing and had to remind herself to breathe deeply. "I always felt winded."

As I author this book, I am cautious about sharing too much of my own story because I want it to be about the research. However, as a leader, I also wrestled with breathing when I was in the height of my silencing experience. At the time, I did not have the label for “silencing.” I just knew I was suffering from a lot of psychological stress and did not feel I had a voice that was valued. The specifics of my story are not necessary; in many ways, they are similar to the women I interviewed and will be comparable to my readers. I had a professional relationship that silenced me.

Amid that silencing, I found myself constantly breathless. At times, I literally could not catch my breath to speak, and I was not exercising at these moments to explain the sensation, nor was I overweight or diagnosed with anything specific to explain it. This breathlessness became difficult for me as I was in a position that required public speaking and the ability to project my voice. However, I could not do it without severe pain in my trachea or chest, and taking a deep breath was an effort—it was hard to get air in and even harder to exhale it out.

I was misdiagnosed three times. First, I had an allergist tell me it was seasonal allergies and to take a pill. Second, I had a different physician hypothesize that I had most likely developed adult asthma and to use an inhaler. Last, and my favorite, I had a primary care doctor tell me I was probably suffering from anxiety and to take a different medication. I knew in my gut that none of those things seemed accurate, but to be honest, I felt ashamed to keep pressing for answers. What if the physical pain was just pretended? I honestly did not know what to do with myself.

After almost two years of this, I finally had a conversation with an emergency room doctor, who was also a colleague and he ordered a CT scan. It took me using my privilege in a system that is not always designed to work on behalf of people who cannot quite explain their pain or symptoms in textbook terms. I had to call in favors and leverage relationships. I realize now that without relying on those connections, I have no idea what might have happened.

The test results showed it was not allergies, asthma, or anxiety. I had idiopathic subglottic stenosis (I.S.S.). In standard terms—my trachea was filled with scar tissue for no darn good reason. I had never had a breathing tube or a tracheotomy, two things most likely to cause the severe scar tissue found in my throat. When I met with the surgeon who would perform several of the needed surgeries to open up my airway, he said to me, “Girlie, I’ve got good news and bad news. The good news, God gave you an hour-glass figure. The bad news, he stuck it in your trachea.”

My condition is so rare, it is almost always misdiagnosed. Also, interesting to note, it is scarce for a man to have this same condition. It is primarily something that only women over the age of forty experience. The most recent statistics I have seen suggest I in 500,000 women are diagnosed with I.S.S. each year. There is no cure for this condition, just surgical interventions to maintain the airway.

There is not a correlation I can declare between I.S.S. and feeling silenced, and yet I cannot help but wonder about my silencing and my physical condition. I have had seven surgeries since I was diagnosed. Despite having a healthy voice and a complete recovery from feeling silenced, my body has not fully recovered, and I will most likely experience regular surgeries for the rest of my life. Cheryl Glenn’s words in her book *Unspoken*, as haunting and accurate as they are, continue to remind me: “The relationship of language—and silence—to deprivation is profound. What happens when one needs to—or should—speak and is cut off from the possibility of speaking? What kind of deprivation does the silenced body experience?”<sup>3</sup>

Aside from the respiratory issues that women may experience when they feel silenced, another large group of participants explained how their digestive tracts were severely challenged as well. On one end, I heard things like weight gain, stress eating, or loss of appetite. On the other severe side, I heard things like ulcers, acid reflux, stomach tears, reconstructive surgeries, and heavy doses of medication.

A professor at a private college said, “I feel [silencing] in my gut. I feel it from my solar plexus down to my intestinal tract, and I can feel it tighten up.”

An executive who performed professional services for the education industry stated,

I started having really severe stomach pains, to the point that they were running all sorts of different tests, and it ended up primarily being just really, really, really severe acid reflux, and a couple of other things that I was able to get under control. But just so much constant pain in my stomach.

An attorney told me, “I was having physical problems. I had ulcers. I was a wreck.”

We have all had those moments in life when our systems do not operate correctly. Sometimes we literally lose our shit! However, when women are consistently and severely silenced over a period, the stomach and intestines can become permanently damaged. We can easily explain away our symptoms as part of growing old or repercussions of poor food choices, or we can begin to recognize correlations between when we feel we have agency and voice versus when we do not. Often women described shifts happening in the body during the same period they began to feel silenced in their leadership. In some cases, they recover their voice and body. In other cases, the physical problems continue long after the silencing ceases.

The last category of physical pain is what I am calling overall body stress. Women described a tightness or heaviness in the body. If they were carrying a heavy psychological load, their bodies, shoulders, necks, and feet felt it as well. Sometimes it was an unusual but specific symptom, such as an eye twitch that never healed requiring a new eye prescription. Or a stutter they developed in their speech during times of silencing. One even talked about grinding her teeth so hard, she broke three and needed a night guard. Other times, women described the pain in generic ways such as how they were in constant need of a massage because



their shoulders were always scrunched up next to their earlobes or they would have chronic tension headaches and migraines. One participant said this:

At one point I had to go to the doctor because I was having trouble concentrating and focusing, and I had headaches, and don't laugh, but I had to hold my head up when I talked to people because I was so stressed out, and that's when I went to the physician, who said, "You are suffering from major stress," and of course he told me to get another job, which wasn't possible. I'm the support for my family—financial support.

An executive director in nonprofit gave this specific example when I asked her to tell me how feeling silenced impacted her in a physical way.

"Very stressful. Very stressful. I manifest my stress by overeating, and I feel it. . . . I see a chiropractor three times a week. A lot of pinched nerves, a lot of joint issues. Those sorts of things."

I then asked, "Where in your body, were you most impacted?"

She replied, "Probably in the nerves here in my neck through my hands. I was fighting numbness in my hands a lot. During that period." She went on to tell me the pain lasted a good eighteen months.

Over 75 percent of the women I spoke to describe changes to their bodies during episodes of feeling silenced. There are too many examples or specifics to list in this chapter. However, the primary categories of physical pain manifested in the respiratory and digestive system, along with full-body stress.

It is essential to not just focus on the physical pain that the silencing virus can cause. There is also the issue of psychological illness. Chapter 2 covered some of the emotional issues a silenced woman may live with, but the summary may not do justice to the things I heard women say. They suffered, and still suffer, forms of extreme exhaustion and emotional distress. This is often the hidden pain no one sees.

## THE SILENCING VIRUS CAUSES PSYCHOLOGICAL PAIN

It is hard to hold it together sometimes. It can feel like we need to have that mask of protection on at all times to hide the hidden soft spots that are wounded and bruised. There is a lot of mystery and stigma surrounding mental health issues, and people are often more comfortable addressing the wounds they can see or measure. We can verify acid reflux, see broken teeth, observe the scale that says we are gaining or losing weight. Fevers, test results, a doctor's note that says surgery is required, or testing positive for strep are all empirical. These things can be filed into categories that do not require too much removal of unconscious bias. Poor mental health is different, and there is a lot of shame that women wrestle with when silencing brings about severe episodes of depression, exhaustion, or emotion.

Even in the interviews, executive women tended to redden, tear up and cry, curl inward, or shift their bodies when they described the emotional toll. Here is a sample of things I heard. I argue that even saying some of this aloud came at a price.

An executive in education disclosed,

I have gained about . . . I don't want to exaggerate this; I'm trying to do the math in my head. At the peak of it, I have gained about 60 pounds since the silencing got worse. And as I said, my mental health took a really severe turn. I had bad depression, suicidal ideation, and really severe anxiety. I had panic attacks when I [had] to get to work in the morning; panic attacks when my boss entered the room, inability to sleep at night, worrying about my boss, worrying about how conversations went, worrying if decisions were right or wrong. And then with the self-doubt, finding that it transferred so much into other areas of my life.

An executive in finance reported,

I had lost about 35 pounds of weight. I could not sleep. I couldn't eat. I was crying. I couldn't stop crying a lot. Like I would just cry all the time, which is really not me, but the not sleeping, not eating, a large amount of weight loss, all of those things. Exhaustion. You know, just being exhausted.

A marketing executive admitted, "I was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, so my body ultimately did crash."

An executive in technology described, "It was like a balloon that had been completely deflated. I was just filled with anxiety and stress, and at other times, I just felt like a worthless piece of trash. Just like wow, I'm just not even worth anything; like why am I even bothering."

This was shared by an executive who works for a major business consultancy:

The spiritual and emotional part of that yanks me back into, "Well, maybe I don't deserve to be heard, or maybe my ideas are stupid, or maybe I'm crazy." Some of it is about questioning my place in the universe, like, "What am I doing here?" I get kind of existential too, like, "Does my life have any purpose?" That sort of thing. I mean emotionally, I will be down, sad, or experience feelings of isolation.

These examples are lifted straight from participant transcripts and came when I asked them to share with me how they were emotionally impacted when they felt silenced. Saying all these things required them to find words while their bodies also reacted to the questions. Women began to cup the back of their necks or even run their hands down their throats. I noticed that interviews would begin with crisp and articulate answers, but then voice quality would shift with the emergence of emotion. Women often whispered, broke eye contact, coughed, or had a hard time talking. The cadence of their voices moved as they recounted their stories. Years after the silencing encounters, the body was still keeping score, and the physical sensations were creeping back in.

In summary, the silencing virus can be dangerous!

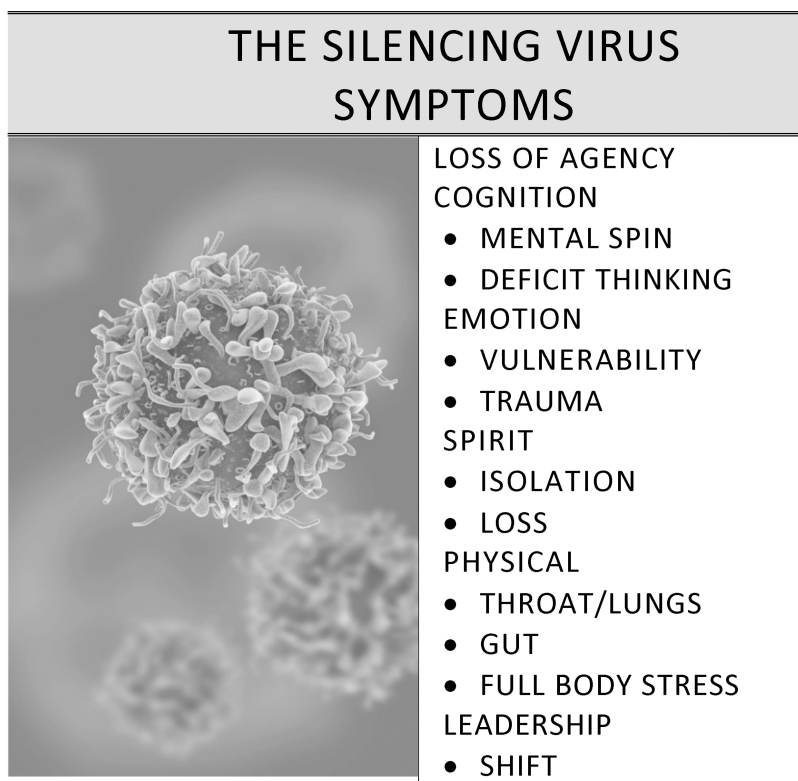
In June 2018, I got the flu. I always get a flu shot, and I am aware that flu season typically is between November and late April. It never occurred to me that I would be inflicted during the summer. I was sick as something—I do not want to say “a dog” because I love dogs. The simile of being sicker than a dog started back in the 1700s when dogs were associated more as vermin that vomited a lot. Fun fact—horses cannot vomit. Who knew?! However, cats can throw up, and I’m not particularly fond of cats (sorry, cat lovers)—so in June when I had the flu, I was sicker than a cat!

I had a fever, aches and pains, digestive issues, coughing, sinus pain. I’ll spare my readers the details, but I was sick, and it lasted several weeks before I was back to what I considered my baseline health.

When women are silenced over an extended period or even just once shockingly, the silencing can shift our spirit, thinking, emotion, body, and leadership in ways that we forget what it was like to be at our baseline. We lose a sense of who we are, or were, and what decisions we are capable of making. We forget that we are wise women with leadership ability and capacity to navigate complex situations and dynamics.

When we are plagued by the contagion of the silencing virus, we lose our sense of agency, and our thinking about self is distorted (see figure 3.1). We overthink, lose sleep, feel like an imposter, and question almost every decision. Our emotional health is compromised in that we feel isolated, disconnected, and traumatized by things that we did not see coming. We feel like we have lost our true north and our inner compass is so spiritually broken, we do not feel attached to the original purpose that brought us into leadership. This is concretely evidenced in some of the words of participants when they began to question their mere existence and were thwarted by a sense of, “why bother?”

On top of this virus messing with our cognition, emotion, and spirit, it can damage our bodies in diabolical ways. Massive weight gain and loss can be harmful. The respiratory and digestive tracts all share space in our narrow necks that can often house a high



**Figure 3.1. The Silencing Virus Symptoms**

load of stress and psychological pain. Many women may not associate their body aches and pains with silencing until they begin to see the windows of time and realize a lot of their suffering is not just natural aging, but perhaps initiated by seasons of leader silencing.

All these complications in our heads, hearts, souls, and body do not leave our leadership footprint unvarnished. We cannot appropriately lead and inspire followers when we feel so compromised. I argue this could be a nuance that keeps women shackled in middle management roles versus promoting into positions that I know they are capable of. Silencing keeps us cramped in smaller

spaces that we are unable to escape. The pain is real, the psychological shift is real, but the good news is all this can swing back to baseline if given the right time and attention.

On average, women who participated in my research described their healing process as lasting up to two years. In many cases, they have not healed yet and deal day in and day out with symptoms and setbacks. Since healing does not come with a flip of the switch, it is essential to understand the different ways female leaders are impacted by relationships, systems, and self. All are accomplices in spreading the silencing virus that keeps far too many women in places they do not want or deserve to be in.

The physical manifestations may vary with silenced women, but the body is not immune from the viral effect of silencing.

The categories of pain described in this chapter are not all-inclusive. The respiratory system, digestive tract, and overall stress on the body were broad patterns that emerged after interviewing dozens of women for this research. Participants reported that at times, the physical manifestations of silencing were extreme and combined with the stress of their roles resulted in significant health problems requiring multiple surgeries and treatment plans. Some participants continue to wrestle with lingering health issues even though they have regained voice. Other participants described how their health immediately improved once their silencing experience ended. The findings do not point to one particular shared health phenomenon; instead, the results suggest a woman's body is impacted when she is silenced. Since we only have one body while we are on this planet, we need to protect it from the psychological stress of silencing.



My new friend Joyce and I ate a meal during her interview. Her story was one of the more painful ones I heard, but just when I began to question my ability to show emotional evenness, she shared with me her recovery and learning. She talked about the systems that silenced her and what she discovered. She recounted

the relationships that muted her and how she shifted them and herself to grow. She also told me how she managed her own self-silencing. These are all topics covered in chapters to come.

Joyce ended up feeling silenced intensely for over three years. When she left her position, she started her own business and the majority of her construction clients she had worked hard to foster followed her. It was a long uphill road that her previous employer did not make easy. “I made a point not to make any negative comments about my former employer, but they made a point to try to blackball me in the industry for three years following.” She hung in there with a level of grit and determination that many people would be unable to find. Her faith, family, loyal clients, and peers who knew what she was experiencing, but were helpless to fix, all made a difference in her eventual return to something close to her original baseline of voice.

Joyce now describes her use of voice as wise and strategic. She is conscious of the type of language she needs to use, and she understands her audience better now because of her experiences. She has greater clarity on her desired outcomes and ways to accomplish her goals.

Like myself with my trachea, Joyce will probably manage lingering health issues in her esophagus and stomach for as long as she lives. Her brain, heart, and spirit are in a place of renewal and health, and she uses voice with a level of efficacy and purpose that I find quite brilliant. But her body will not forget, and despite the psychological healing, the silencing virus has left a lasting imprint on her physical self.





## RELATIONSHIPS THAT SILENCE

*When it comes to silencing, it's assumed that men will just do it. Whereas when women do it to other women, it's scorched earth.*

—Female Washington, D.C., Attorney

I have never been silenced by an inanimate object unless I was talking and literally ran into something and hurt myself too much to speak. I have occasionally been silenced by a noisy animal. Zoos are not always the most natural place to have conversations, especially when the lions are roaring, and the monkeys are screaming. My dog Moose is animated and has been known to make some sounds that stop me mid-sentence. This silencing is welcomed relief and typically the humans in the vicinity chuckle when our feathered or four-legged friends make their voices heard no matter how disruptive. These delays in our speech are playful, and rarely if ever, shift thinking about self or the ability to speak. Animals and objects are not silencers.

People silence people! Humans write words that sting so bad that another person is reluctant to want to write again. Teenagers have their hands on the knobs of music dials and turn them to tune out the voices of parents or authority figures. Women silence women when they roll their eyes, roam over an outfit with a sneer,

or fail to make eye contact. Men silence women when they talk over them, claim ideas as their own, or fail to honor contributions. People silence people when their language is laced with judgment, shame, ridicule, or unintentionality. I intend never to villainize people who silence. These folks are our spouses, kids, moms, dads, friends, bosses, peers, direct reports, customers, and stakeholders. They are you; they are me. We are all capable of being someone's silencer.

This chapter highlights how women silence and how that may differ from how men silence. So much of our reactions to others are wound tight around unconscious bias. By highlighting some specific stories and tendencies, the intention is that we begin to see, *really* see, how simple interactions can cause immeasurable pain.



Ann is the firstborn of four girls with a mother who divorced early. She learned responsibility at a young age and channeled that into a love of learning. She is well-traveled, has lived abroad, and speaks a second language. Ann attended law school and became an accomplished corporate attorney, and eventually moved to DC to work for an independent federal government agency. Her experience as a young attorney was, unfortunately, typical. She worked eighty-hour weeks, was barely acknowledged for her contributions, and saw very few women as female partners. Those she did see were not women she wanted to use as role models. “The partners wouldn’t even say hi to me in the hallway.” When she spent so many waking hours Monday through Saturday at the firm, the incivility was at times unbearable, especially when she decided she wanted to start a family.

We’ve worked so hard academically, professionally, put in the hours, do[ne] all the good work and somehow though we’ve lost the human right to even have children in this environment. I was seen as a liability, less of a contributor, I was not as good as the others and was put on a completely separate track. . . .

But it's not just men. I've been more badly maligned by other women.

Ann walked me through her transition from the Wall Street law firm to the government agency she was still employed with at the time of our interview. She certainly experienced more flexibility in working for the agency versus the law firm. She also endured more silencing.

Her first silencing experience occurred when she requested additional maternity time after her first child was born. Her female boss pushed back on her request and said she did not want to put the paperwork forward for approval until Ann revised it back down to the traditional twelve weeks. "I was apparently the first woman to ask for this." However, Ann knew the kind of experience she brought to this agency, and she also knew her worth as a corporate attorney. She did not believe her request was unreasonable and held her ground. She did not know it at the time, but she was a trailblazer, and since then, other women have been able to take additional time. There is no pay attached to the leave; the agency just holds the position a little longer. For those who can afford it, this option is now available.

This reluctant female boss who was insistent that extended maternity time was unreasonable later dissuaded Ann from pursuing promotional opportunities. Ann was not deterred. She returned from her leave, working reduced hours but was ready to engage fully. "I just looked at her, and I had to smile. Then I said, 'Well it's always good practice to interview,' and I proceeded."

It is hard to say if what happened next was random or intentional. The interview was with two people, a young white male with similar Wall Street experience reporting to an older white female in her late fifties with no children who had worked at the agency her entire career. The male attorney, Daniel, managed the whole interview and the older female, Helen, did not ask any substantive questions. Toward the end of the meeting, Helen spoke up.

She finally says to me, “Well Ann,” and she has my application materials in front of her and is putting on this concerned, confused face that is very dismissive. She reads the top of the letter and says, “I see here that you’re available,” and she’s like stumbling through what I had written and acted like it was incoherent. And she said, “Are you aware this is a full-time position?”

Ann had already made it clear she was ready to engage in full-time work. This question had been answered! Ann was still feeling subtly punished for having a baby and taking extended time off. She came back to work with reduced hours for a short period and knew any promotion she sought would require her to work full-time and then some. She was fully ready to work hard—having a baby at home did not change this. “I remember Daniel was so taken aback by Helen. He couldn’t even contain his disgust that this was his boss’s contribution to the interview. Helen just sat there and tried to take me down. She wanted to discount me.”

The good news was that despite Helen’s objections, Daniel offered Ann the job, and she excelled! She was responsible for high-profile matters and performed well. She described how she believed she eventually won over Helen with her contributions. Ann had a second baby and came back with as much vigor as the first time. When Daniel was later promoted to another division, he made it clear to Ann that he thought she was a shoo-in for the position he was vacating. However, when the time came, Ann was not selected. Despite her success at running big deals, managing groups, and acting as a senior advisor throughout the building, Helen did not step up and offer support.

Ann requested a debrief meeting with Helen to learn more about why she was not promoted. Helen kept asking Ann why she wanted the role, and none of her answers seem to satisfy. “Helen was so flustered with me. She said, ‘Jesus Christ Ann, why can’t you be like Natalie?’” Natalie was an excellent attorney at a big law firm who married a law firm partner. Like Ann, they met their husbands in law school. Natalie was one of many female attorneys who had taken the step back to have children while the husband

moved forward. They had babies, worked fewer hours, and did not seek promotional opportunities.

Even years later, I could see the pain in Ann as she recounted this experience.

It was crushing. I really felt like the wind was just knocked out of me. Someone who you think would be supportive, you think you've proven yourself, you've worked so hard to be on call, to be responsive and you give so much. At the end of the day, you're just placed into this category of she really didn't want moms on her staff. They were a bother. They were an inconvenience, something to be avoided at all cost.

Another person may have given up; Ann has not. She now has three children and has put a lot of energy into ensuring she stays physically healthy for her family. She was ultimately hired away from Helen's division into another area by a male boss who saw her potential and ability. She has successfully worked for him for eight years but has been unsuccessful when she tries to further promote into higher levels. She keeps hearing she is the runner-up. Her male boss is supportive and will include her in developmental meetings that are relevant based on her talent and expertise. However, she is often uninvited to these same meetings by female executives. Ann hears snide comments said behind her back that reference her being married to a law firm partner and does not need a promotion.

"There's an element of social shaming in it with women. It's the mean girl in middle school dynamic. Don't talk to her; she's not one of us."

In this example, the female boss was not only a silencer, but she also fostered other female attorneys to silence.

Ann shared another example of how she requested a letter of reference from a female colleague in the firm only to be denied. There were women who made political decisions to be part of certain groups and did not want to show support to individual women—women like Ann. "She knew how unethical that was for

her to do and how unprofessional. I think she was ashamed. She wouldn't even look at me passing in the hallway. She saw me scorned by a queen bee and was willing to break off our relationship." Her colleague decided to protect her career versus supporting a friend seeking a promotion. She did not want Ann to shine, nor did she want to be affiliated with someone whom other powerful women in the firm had disassociated from.

"I think the most difficult thing is just being treated like that. Being dismissed and really degraded and disrespected in a group setting and meetings with other people who visibly lowered their eyes."

Many might ask, why does she stay? If she is married to someone with means and does not need to work, what would keep a female leader in this type of situation? How much silencing can one woman take?

Some may not want to hear this—but not every female who is married to a successful working spouse wants to be home with their kids! Not every woman wants to take a back seat to her partner's career. Many women are called to lead, contribute, and work outside the home. In Ann's case, she is only a few years away from early retirement eligibility. This is a lot to walk away from—something she is unwilling to do. She also believes a lot of her female attorney peers who have taken a step back to be the default house manager or default parent come to regret it. There are more women in law school than ever before. Many of these women do academically better than their male peers and show more exceptional ability and skill.<sup>1</sup> However, the men propel forward and quickly forget the professional sacrifice many women make.

## WORTHINESS

Ann's story is not every woman's story. Not everyone is married with children; not everyone has a six-figure salary. I believe, though, there are elements that may ring true for many of my readers. Women can take their childlessness, singleness, unat-

tached nature and use those features against other women who are attached to children, aging parents, partners, spouses, dogs, cats, and treat them as less worthy. The opposite can also be true. I have known women with children and spouses to believe that unattached women are less effective in leadership because some think that parenting or marriage deepens a person's ability to connect, care, and lead. If women are not careful, we will weaponize what we find most worthy and attack our own gender.

When we do this as women, we become a face with a name in the head and heart of another woman. Ann could name them (names have been changed), and she could see them years later as she participated in the research interview. Her silencers were other women who were attached to beliefs about children, successful husbands, women who sought promotion, and women who advocated for themselves. All these things are positive attributes that men are rarely judged for, and yet they were used against her, and she felt silenced. Ann was not successful in getting the type of promotion of which she was capable. She is one of many.

One of my favorite authors, Brené Brown, says, "No one belongs here more than you."<sup>2</sup> No other context or explanation is needed. I love this quote. I appreciate how it feels like a warm jacket that I do not need to wrestle over a sweater. The sleeves fit perfectly, and it's not too tight across the shoulders or in the armpits. It makes my butt look great, and I feel pretty when I put it on. What if every woman treated members of their own gender as if no one belonged here more than them?

Women are instrumental in making sure other women feel a sense of warmth and belonging. Yes, men can be great hosts and create comfortable environments, but even they are short of superpowers when women swoop in with ice in their veins. Women can turn the thermostat down with just a shift in the shoulder. They control the weather in a room or on teams in ways I have never seen a man come close. We are quite skilled in passive-aggressive behavior, and we can create tension with minimal effort.

## QUEEN BEE SYNDROME

In her interview, Ann mentions how she was scorned by a queen bee. This analogy is also a syndrome that is often described in female leader literature. The queen bee syndrome describes a woman in a position of authority who views or treats subordinates more critically if they are female.<sup>3</sup> I can surmise so many different reasons for this. First, women have to work so hard to achieve executive roles. Across the United States, studies show women hold fewer than 15 percent of all executive positions. We may not admit it, but to see a younger or lower-level woman arrive so effortlessly at the same level can feel unfair. We worked hard—they should work as well. This unconscious (or conscious) bias is a dangerous cycle that is at the heart of a lot of silencing. It can keep women from mentoring or fully appreciating their female subordinates, peers, and colleagues.

This syndrome does not just show up at high levels of female leadership; it rears its ugly features in middle or high school with adolescent girls. We do not need to be a parent to worry about the damaging effects of mean girl behavior. I cannot find a woman alive who wants to go back in time and relive those painful adolescent years. Girls struggle to find their group or clique. Girls can be judgmental about clothing, hair, makeup, boyfriends, and everything that is lacking in real substance. I have a daughter, and I see how she struggles, and I can see how she might be a struggle to her friends because her teenage brain is still developing and her sense of empathy and inclusion is not fully baked yet. We would also have to be born under a rock not to know that teenage suicide and mental health issues seem to be on the rise.

Queen bee behavior is probably something every female has experienced before the age of twenty, but it doesn't have to be something that lingers into adulthood or that enters into the workforce. It can stop when women recognize they are doing their gender so much harm by adopting a mind-set that opposes those who are trying to shine.



The men reading this are probably nodding their heads in agreement all the while admitting they often feel inept at knowing how to intervene. Gentlemen, keep reading! There are specific ways you can leverage your relationships with women to help dissolve this tension. You can partner with women to help them de-weaponize, take out their stinger, and together, both genders need to learn how to amplify.

## AMPLIFICATION

My family *loves* movies!

We are nerdy to the point of putting notes on our calendars when a beloved film, seen on the big screen, is coming out on DVD/Blu-ray. The date it arrives in stores, we make a special trip to Target and then watch it soon after at home. We like to own our favorite flicks. We also do not just watch them over and over—we also turn on all needed sound systems, and the movie is amplified all over the house.

Amplification is the process of increasing the volume. When something cannot be heard, we plug it into a system that turns up and spreads the sound. We can also amplify the voices of our colleagues.

One of my dissertation committee members, now friend, Dr. Kerry Mitchell, sent me an article written by Claire Landsbaum about the shine theory—“If you don’t shine, I don’t shine.”<sup>4</sup> It was about the female staffers in the Obama administration and what they did to ensure female voices were heard.

Female staffers developed a meeting strategy they called “amplification”: When a woman made a critical point, another female repeated it, giving credit to her. This forced the men in the room to recognize the contribution—and denied them the chance to claim the idea as their own.

“We just started doing it and made a purpose of doing it. It was an everyday thing,” said one former aide. She said President Obama

ma noticed, and began calling more often on women and junior aides.<sup>5</sup>

Two simple things resonate from this article:

Repeat the person's name! Often ideas are born, discussed, modified, and tweaked until the person who originally had the suggestion is no longer associated with its birth. When a woman has a good idea, it is often lost and reclaimed by men at the table. To amplify someone's voice, be sure to acknowledge that person by name.

Repeat the idea! When you associate the idea with the person who came up with it and repeat it as a good idea—you amplify that person's voice.

This concept of amplification may seem simple, but I have been to a lot of meetings where great ideas are shared, and no one responds. Perhaps it is a habit, competition, cultural norms, or a matter of only speaking when called. It is a generous act of leadership to amplify a person by name, repeat a good idea, and give credit. It does not take a vast speech or a lot of context; it can be a few simple words to help someone shine. Sometimes simple things make a big difference!

I wonder how Ann's experience might have been different if more people in her agency had been intentional and amplified her in meetings? What would it take to treat everyone like they belong? Worthiness does not need to be treated like a commodity to which only a few have access. An abundance of worth could result in an abundance of contribution. Unfortunately, I keep seeing the same thing over and over. We live and work in a constant mind-set of scarcity—our behavior demonstrates that there is not enough status to go around. Status is often used by our male leaders and colleagues as a weapon of choice to silence.

## **MEN WHO SILENCE**

I could fill this book with nothing but stories of women who feel silenced by men. I have not and won't because it is not helpful; I

doubt anyone would read it. At a basic level, the narrative of women who feel silenced all begin to blend and show similar patterns. There is a “good ol’ boys club,” and if you are female, you may never gain entry. (This can also be true of anyone who is not a heterosexual white man.)

Whether we say *boys club*, *ol’*, or *good*, at a basic level all women know what this idiom means. I was coaching a male executive recently who works in the TV internet business who shared with me that his leadership team was about to get a dose of change. As a group of white men, they have traditionally held late off-site meetings at the bar drinking beer (a lot of beer). He said they were bringing an executive female on to the team and their beer drinking meetings needed to end.

Thankfully, my client is mature enough to realize that changing this male-dominant practice is not a deal-breaker. However, for some men, modifying their hardwired, “no girls allowed” thinking that started at the age of five, can be a big deal. Some men may not want the club to evolve and will even put up roadblocks for women. It has nothing to do specifically with her as a person or the role she holds; they may like and respect her, but—*SHE.IS.A.GIRL!* That alone can be enough for their way of working, thinking, living, and feeling to be threatened.

The beer-drinking example is fairly overt; it is often less evident as the boy’s club dynamic can be hidden or unspoken. Many men advocate for women being on the team or at the table until their implicit rules of status and certainty begin to feel violated. Participants in my research described how they assume men will eventually try to silence them or perhaps take credit for one of their ideas. It is expected, and for many women, they can process and handle the phenomenon in ways that do not make them feel intolerably silenced. Others do not always bounce back as fast.

Women work hard to prove themselves and demonstrate worth. Sometimes those attempts to show value violate gender roles that have long been inappropriately accepted. Men may not know how to process what seems to be a subtle attack on their male privilege. These gender dynamics can create a vicious cycle.

Men want to retain their status, and women are eager to be included. I had one female executive in the education field share this with me:

There was definitely a gender dynamic to power, and I resented it. I felt like the men got to play “thinker” roles, and the women got to play “busy doer” roles, and I didn’t like that. Every time there was a “We’re going to brainstorm. Who will write on the big post-it note?” I sat there and refused to do it. I knew no man would stand up. I looked at the other women in the room thinking, “Stop standing up. Stop standing up. Stop relegating us to the role of note-taker and pseudo secretary from 1950. We’re in the room for the same reason.” I resented that piece of acceptance—accepting that guys don’t really like to write, or they have terrible handwriting. I was tired of all that stuff.

This example is one of many. It comes back to the socially constructed idea of status. David Rock has a great model called SCARF as seen in figure 4.1.<sup>6</sup>

The SCARF model is subjective, but it drives behavior in both men and women. Typically speaking, men desire status as profoundly as women want relatedness. Sometimes those desires can be at odds as women work hard to feel included, and men work hard to maintain status and a sense of autonomy. The rub becomes even more intense when women step outside the social roles that are assigned to their gender and demonstrate traits more often associated with men.

Maggie is an engineer by trade, and at the time of my interview, she was pursuing her PhD. As often the only female executive at the table, she had this to say:

Because I work in such a male-dominant industry, they see us as an invasion of female leaders. I’ve done a lot of reading about the challenge. People have a hard time because I think men, in general, see women as in this nurturing stereotype. And when we are a hard-charging leader, they have a hard

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# SCARF

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STATUS – STAYING RELEVANT  
AND VALUABLE TO OTHERS

CERTAINTY – BEING ABLE TO  
PREDICT OR KNOW WHAT TO  
EXPECT

AUTONOMY – HAVING SOME  
LEVEL OF CONTROL OVER THE  
ENVIRONMENT

RELATEDNESS – FEELING A  
SENSE OF SAFETY WITH  
OTHERS

FAIRNESS – A PERCEPTION  
THAT EXCHANGES ARE FAIR

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**Figure 4.1. SCARF**

time. “She’s not supposed to act like that.” And, “Hey this is kind of the boys club. And I don’t want women in our club.”

Maggie describes how early in her career she felt she had no voice. She had to put her nose to the grindstone and work hard to prove she belonged. When she finally earned her place at the executive table, she had to keep assessing her worth as her insecurities kept her asking, “Am I good enough to have a voice? Do I deserve a seat at this table?” As she wrestled with these issues, her male counterparts and bosses were oblivious to what she was experiencing or how they were contributing.

This obliviousness was a theme throughout all my research and interviews. Women often described men as relentless and incessant in their silencing but also unknowing with their impact. How can that be? How can men who hold the majority of just about everything in life, continue to miss their impact on the other half of the population—the female half? For me, it is a real head-scratcher.

However, I have met and worked with amazing men who are beginning to see the dissonance and are shifting in their roles to be male allies. I have one friend named Evan who falls into this category. He is a CPA by trade and has held several executive positions in organizations. He made an unconventional shift out of corporate to become an executive coach. I met him through another colleague, and we are now fast and furious friends.

Evan realizes the value of the female voice and has modified his coaching practice to advocate that organizations change their practices and show more inclusion. I believe he may have more success as a white male CPA turned coach shifting club membership requirements than the long line of women who stand at the door and knock with the wrong code word.

My friend is not alone, but he may be a bit lonely. Being a male ally can feel like uncharted territory in male-dominant industries. An ally is not just someone who makes a declaration; allies actually change their mind-sets and their behaviors.

When executive men step in and show affiliation, partnership, and acceptance of their female colleagues, it can change things almost immediately.

When men can release their hold on their own version of SCARF and accept that status is less important than being grounded in purpose, vision, and values. Certainty can be replaced by acceptance of the unknown and a willingness to navigate in the “I don’t know.” Autonomy only works so long, and success at the next level requires a sense of collectiveness and understanding that more is possible with shared ideas.

Relatedness can include both genders. We need to move away from those conservative ideas that men cannot have lunch with other women alone, or that men need to be careful not to have female friends at work lest they give the impression that something improper is happening. My response to that is, *oh, please*—or, not true! Men and women can and should be friendly—to be a good advocate and ally of women, men have to be ready to be a good friend. I talk more about this in chapter 11, so at a minimum, men, please read that chapter.

Last, men and women need to understand that there is no such thing as fairness. I do not think it is fair that I failed my comprehensives twice in my doctoral program. Setbacks are normal in this academic setting—but still, *it felt so unfair!* I also know that some scholars saw me as having an unfair advantage when I was able to get the president of the university to be my dissertation committee chair. I asked. She said yes. Shoulder shrug—it all seems fair to me.

Fairness is such a slippery concept that is wrapped up in so many gray areas of bias and perception.

Perhaps we need to put the concept of fairness back into the classroom where the kids cry foul when someone cuts in line or a classmate always brings cold pizza for lunch when others are stuck with the usual peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Crying “unfair” is expected when you are eight years old but should probably be outlawed in adulthood. A leader’s vocabulary needs to include mature words. Instead of fair, we should consider what is equita-

ble? Instead of thinking someone is “so lucky,” perhaps there needs to be consideration for their level of effort to be successful. Expecting or exacting the same process for everyone is not realistic.

In summary, both genders are participating in the silencing of female leaders in ways that do not serve anyone involved. Women need to lean in without pushing or stinging another female colleague in the process. When women feel silenced by one of their own, it can feel intensely personal, and the pain can be severe. On the other hand, men need to get more personal and intentional in promoting the voices of women. When men mind their own business or operate with a safe “boys club” mentality, it can be painfully silencing for women in leadership. It really does take both genders to create balance and voice because as the next chapter demonstrates, systems may not be as pliable as individuals.



## SYSTEMS THAT SILENCE

*Upon reflection, at the time, I felt like my silencer was the Senior Vice President. She certainly was the ringleader, but I think it was bigger than that.*

—Human Resources Vice President

**L**ike many people, I will never forget where I was when certain past events happened. I was driving back from a college roommate's wedding on August 31, 1997, when I learned that Princess Diana was killed in a car accident. Details of that day would normally slip from memory, but because of the tragedy, I remember what I was wearing, how I styled my hair, and the actual road conditions. I was at a Georgetown coaches alumni conference when the news broke about Sandy Hook and all those precious lives that were taken too soon on December 14, 2012. As much as I love to learn and be with other coaches, my ability to hear anything spoken at the conference that day was minimal as I scrolled through breaking news reports on my phone. I remember the helpless feeling, rage, pain, and deep, dark feelings of confusion.

I am sure most can recollect every nuance of their day in vivid detail when the terrible events of 9/11 occurred. There is a beautiful tribute at the New York memorial showcasing artwork for the museum by Spencer Finch, the only artist commissioned. His

piece is called *Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on that September Morning*. I can stare at the wall, which is comprised of different shades of crystalline blue from floor to ceiling, and remember so many details about that morning. Colors, emotions, sensations, sounds, sights, and everything that can be received by exteroception are heightened when we live through something tragic.

I would never place a silencing encounter at the same level as these life and death events; however, what is similar is a woman's ability to recall in exact detail specifics about people and conversations far in the past. It is also easier to remember silencing encounters when our silencers have faces and names. For example, the feelings of betrayal when that female peer disclosed things you thought you had shared with her in confidence and were later used against you by a boss. Or that time your boss's boss commented on a great idea and gave credit to a male colleague and then chided you when you reminded him it came from you. These are crisp and specific scenarios that are not hard to associate with feeling silenced. And yet, there is something else going on when we realize that even if we replaced those individuals with new people, bosses, or peers, we might feel the same—silenced.

As the last chapter outlined, most participants in my research named at least one or two people who initially caused a reaction that they would later describe as silencing. The people and things that were said or done are seared in their memories. However, silencing encounters may morph into something that is far bigger than individuals, especially as women attempt to navigate organizations and societal systems that silence, along with the cultures and climates that have unspoken norms. This chapter unpacks some of these dynamics.

## **SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED SYSTEMS**

“Systems” is a word that people use often. It means a set of things that work together or a set of principles or procedures in which

something is done. At a basic level, systems are mechanical and technical. I will probably never be smart enough to understand how to get my laptop to boot up faster or what buttons to push in the garage when it comes to the timing of our underground sprinklers, but if I gave it some energy and focus, I suppose I could learn it. In theory, anyone can learn these types of things because there is a right or wrong way to operate the system.

When it comes to understanding the systems of human beings, all the rules change. We use words like “culture,” which has many meanings, one of which is to understand the customs of a social group. “Climate” is another buzz word with a lot of meaning; one of which is the prevailing trend of public opinion.

Organizational systems, culture, and climate are all created, fostered, and sustained by subjective human beings. These are *social* constructs—ways to understand the world that are shared assumptions about reality. “Social” suggests human beings are involved versus objects, and “construct” is a subjective idea or theory not based on empirical evidence. We are all a bunch of meaning-making FHBs (fallible human beings) running around trying not to be too weird while we make sense of the world and simultaneously find a sense of belonging.

One of the most impactful forms of social construction that shifted my thinking came from the book *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. What caused the shift was the chapter on interdependence and autonomy, especially in regard to societal norms with sleeping infants.<sup>1</sup> First, let me back up and say this is not a leadership example, but one to which I think everyone can relate. Next, let me say, I was not a beautiful, calm, or great new mom. I was one of those new moms who *suffered*. I did not experience immediate levels of ecstasy when my newborn was placed on my chest after a (literal) ripping, hours-long, vaginal birth. Nor did I immediately forget the pain as I held my new baby in my arms. Au contraire—I remembered everything! I also thought I was going to vomit like a cat because as the epidural wore off, I was nauseous.

I was a living example of death warmed over as I started my journey of being a biological mom. Just about anything that could be bizarre or wrong is part of my story. I also had some untreated postpartum depression, which is not something I should have dismissed or hoped away. So, I decided it was in my best interest to worry over everything. Food, schedule, toys, pacifiers, thumbs, allergies, immunizations, poop, sleep—you name it. I was also susceptible to, and absorbed, *everyone's* opinion, which is rarely helpful to any new mom—even the calm, pretty ones.

The one opinion or as I call it, social construct, that completely kicked my butt was how babies should sleep in America. The whole idea of schedules, separating food from sleep, no bed-sharing or blankets, letting them cry it out, and always ensuring they sleep on their back was a cluster of parental failures. Now I know, there is research and medical studies about these things. No one needs to email me or give my book a bad review—trust me, I know. But my newborn daughter did not get the memo, and none of those prevailing public opinions (born in 1945 by Dr. Spock) or shared assumptions about reality worked.<sup>2</sup> She only wanted to sleep on her tummy (collective gasp); she would not sleep unless I gave her a warm bottle at night with a spoon full of Ovaltine. I have probably just lost a few readers. Yes, I gave my daughter chocolate milk at night to get her to sleep. Then even worse, she ended up only spending part of her night in the crib because when she cried, her delirious mom put her in the middle of the bed with a snoring father on one side, and the aforementioned delirious mom on the other. Again, I know this is against Ferber's 1985 advice!<sup>3</sup>

I did (eventually) wean her off the 10 pm ritual of Ovaltine, or I might have moved to 8pm—I cannot completely recall. I never let her cry it out because I could not handle the pain—even today, when I see my now teenage daughter cry something tribal breaks inside me. She also slept in our bedroom until she was four years old. Two years of her head butting against my belly and her left foot up my husband's nose put us at wit's end. None of us were getting the sleep we needed.

One night, when she wobbled in at her usual 1 am hour, I took the tough love approach and said, “You are not sleeping in here; it’s either your own bed or the floor.” She was perfectly fine with the floor. The next two years, my toddler slept on the “cot,” which was nothing more than four or five blankets layered on top of each other between my bed and the dresser. She brought in a few lovies, and her own pillow, and that became our new normal. She would go to bed on her cot between 7–8 pm (I kept a schedule—I was not a complete disaster), and my husband and I just walked around her. She was such a sound sleeper and never was bothered by the sounds of our evening routine of lights, doors opening or closing, evening news, and quiet discussions. She slept well because she was not alone.

I rarely shared my sleep issues with other moms because, quite honestly, I could not, at that time, handle the shame or the comparisons of how their children slept through the night like angels without Ovaltine.

Fast forward to 2014; I read something that rewired my thinking about sleep patterns. Did you know in a study of 136 societies, infants slept with their mother in two-thirds of the communities? In the other third, they all shared the same room. American parents were noted as the only community to maintain separate rooms for their infants. The Japanese think of Americans as a bit merciless that we would push our infants toward independence so fast. East Africans see us as near barbarians for the way we treat our babies. From these different societal perspectives, we take a new baby that has never been alone and stick it in its own bed with bars like a prison. Then we do further harm by putting them in a separate room in the house called a nursery and leave them there to sleep alone (even when they cry). In their minds, it is criminal.

Who is right? I believe that for every qualitative study that suggests that something is best, there might be another that contradicts and suggests another option. Almost every part of our lives as humans is socially constructed. We throw out some research that gets picked up by the media and repeated. Smart European-descended Americans (mostly white men) write books

suggesting they have reliable answers and advice that everyone should subscribe to and before you know it, our babies are sleeping in cages without food or water, and we badge ourselves as excellent and disciplined parents.

If I had read that America was one of the only societies that openly disapproved of the idea of children sleeping with their parents before I gave birth, I would have been able to release the shame, anxiety, and self-silencing of my parenting choices. The good news is my daughter survived her Ovaltine-cot experience without any cavities or trauma, and I've learned never to give advice or judge a new mom. If anything, I tell them that every child is unique, trust their instincts, and remember there are lots of ways to be right. I also tell them that sometimes, civilization gets it wrong.

Just like sleeping patterns, when it comes to organizational systems, culture, and climate we have to deconstruct the things that have become normal and investigate why we do what we do, say what we say, or believe what we believe. Did a white man once declare something as right and since, we have never stopped believing it true? We have to ask: How did this become the way things are done? Why do we talk this way? Act this way? Avoid these things? When did all this become normal?

I also do not think any two organizations have the same culture or climate. Each one is unique, requiring nuanced conversations and questions to surface dynamics in the system that may silence. From vivid descriptions of what happened in an encounter told with complete detail to vague atmospheric shadows in the hallways that cannot quite be described, behind every silencing experience is a system that allowed it to happen.

## **CONSTRUCT EXAMPLES**

People with voices that are heard, always carry the most currency in an organization. This is not about the loudest voice getting audience. People can be heard but not followed—suggesting they

have little currency. People may be heard because they are highly effective in their role and have curated followership. Or perhaps they are listened to because they have the accepted demographic features. Sometimes, people are heard or not heard because of a symbolic box, which is an imaginary structure in a system that may yield a great deal of power.

In 1854, a man named Daniel McCallum created something that has now become a widely accepted social construct. This same man is on my list of people to smack upside the head if I am ever able to travel back in time. McCallum is known for drafting the first organization chart.<sup>4</sup>

He developed something that solved a problem his era was facing—chaos and disorganization in a work environment that did not always treat workers as they deserved.

Fast forward to today, many large organizations still ride or die by their org chart. It determines the scope of authority, pay scales, the hierarchy in the organization, sometimes succession plans and almost always, it determines voice. I remember working for an organization early in my career that went to great effort to create the leadership org chart on paper, manually. Within hours of its distribution, it would be outdated because someone resigned or a decision was made to scramble things again. Despite a lot of wasted energy, that company kept updating it and doing their best to keep it active because that was the way it was supposed to be done.

Most organizations today do not go to the effort of printing it or manually shepherding this document. They now use Visio or some elaborate software. It may not be published but make no mistake, the concept behind the org chart is embedded in the way most organizations work, and leaders lead.

I have heard many mid-level leader clients react when I ask them why they have not taken an idea or concern to someone beyond their immediate supervisor. This question is most often asked when I learn they are struggling with a boss that shuts them down and will not advocate for them in ways they deem essential. When I ask the question, I already know the answer I am going to

receive, and I'm rarely wrong. I hear, "Unless asked, we do not skip in this organization." They are not talking about a light, bouncy step. They are referencing a literal or figurative box on an org chart. They do not feel they can have a conversation with someone unless that person falls in the square immediately above them on a piece of paper or a computer screen.

Is it just me, or does this seem strange? It's just a box. It's just a piece of paper. Or at best, it's just a figure on a screen. However, these lines that connect are keeping both men and women from engaging in conversations with other individuals in the same company, same division, or worse, same hallway. These conversations are critical and needed, but not happening.

I have also heard other stories about how organization charts can silence, and it is not just about hierarchy. Sometimes it is the label inside that box that can create a silencing experience. Or it may be the perception of what that box should hold in regard to experience.

For example, Elaine spent a great deal of her career promoting up through a large retail organization that focused on prescription eyeglasses. She had a background in marketing but was skilled in business development and strategic planning. She was tapped on the shoulder to become a division leader overseeing more than a dozen different retail sites.

So, here I am in charge of a division and we were having a big team meeting with all the senior leaders. Most of the people who were now division managers had come up through retail operations. I was the first person to be brought in to division management with a different background, and my peers felt I wasn't qualified to do this.

In the meeting, we were talking about scheduling systems. In retail, scheduling is how you make sure that you're using your hours to maximize your sales. Right? It's a very important function.



I remember in this meeting several of my peers telling me that the things I was saying showed that I didn't understand scheduling, at all and that I shouldn't even be speaking about it because I didn't understand it well enough.

... It's almost like I can say that meeting changed my career. It did make me feel silenced, but it touched into some old feelings of inadequacy. It made me decide that I shouldn't take the risk of putting myself into my career the way I had. It made me feel like someone had seen that I was a phony. That I really wasn't who I reported being. That I had been caught and that I just really needed to back off.

Elaine's experience altered her career trajectory. Within months of this meeting, she decided to transition out of her role. At the time of my interview, this incident was a couple of decades in her past. When I asked her how long she has sat in the disappointment of that silencing experience, she surprised me by saying twenty plus years later, she was still not quite over it.

She continued in her career but with different organizations. Unfortunately, some of her experience repeated because as a marketing executive, she was never entirely accepted as a strong operational leader. Her story was not just about peer judgment but also about who gets to sit at the table or reside in a particular box on the organization chart. People will often shame their peers for having what they believe are lower-ranking qualifications. They have not earned the socially constructed right to sit in a box just like theirs on a piece of paper. Even when the boxes are different, some boxes tend to be judged by other boxes, especially when they are peers.

For instance, those who sit in boxes that are "operational" in scope may slight or silence those in human resources, marketing, quality, community relations, or other support areas because they deem operations as more important. I had another research participant describe it as the big kid's table and the little kid's table. The big kids were the CFOs, CEOs, and operational vice presi-

dents. The little kid's table was all the vice presidents that were considered support functions versus primary operational functions.

Again, what a strange concept that is socially constructed. Creating a product or delivering a service is deemed more important than the function of managing the people who complete the work, market the product, or ensure the business grows and sustains. At what point did it become normal that vice presidents or senior directors decide certain boxes on the org chart just inherently hold less value than others regardless of who sits in it?

The organization chart is just one example of systems that may silence female leaders. If they hold a support leadership role, they may find themselves on the receiving end of diminishing behavior. This may stay consistent regardless of the peers that come and go because somehow, it has become socially acceptable to perceive “lines that connect” in a particular way.

If an organization has adopted a “we don't skip” culture, women can feel silenced if they have a boss that sits in a box above who blocks them from accessing other boxes around them. I have also heard my female clients tell me that sometimes their boss will direct them not to ask anyone questions or invite other departments to collaborate on work without speaking to them first. This is not only poor practice, but it keeps women feeling small and unable to access the intellect around them that could collectively improve an organization's results.

## **IN-GROUP AND OUT-GROUP BEHAVIOR**

I have facilitated and helped several organizations over the years determine their organization norms, strategic planning, and rules of engagement. Rarely do I see an organization talk about what those words mean. Strategic planning—common language used in a business setting—can refer to a lot of things. If a role is deemed “strategic,” it tends to be elevated over other positions, but what and who determines that label or elevation? Strategic is related to

the identification of long-term or overall interests and means of achievement. In theory, every position is strategic. I believe this term has lost its original meaning. Organizations now use it to say this box is more important—it is strategic—and therefore, the lines that connect, or the person affiliated with this position, are considered members of the in-group.

Another thing I do not hear organization leaders unpack is how power is embedded in the organization chart, and if that works or does not work. Hardly ever have I listened to an organization talk about their perspectives on accessing any box to get work done. Instead, it is masked as an unspoken norm of following the chain of command unless it is critical to lodge a concern and only then should they reach out to the boss's boss. These rules of engagement may not be explicit, but almost every mid-level leader assumes it to be true.

I know several organizations that talk about their open-door policy, but fail to explain what that means if you are a front-line leader several layers below the person saying they have an open door. If the door is open, more needs to be said about the expectation that no one will block anyone from using that door to share an idea or concern. In general, only enough is said to sound engaging and positive, but the words often fall short of making it clear what should happen when reality takes over.

Another favorite thing I hear executive leaders talk about is how vital inclusion and equity is in their organization. They will demonstrate their respect for these concepts by endorsing diversity training or approve unconscious bias work but fail to address the issues of in-group and out-group behavior between disciplines on their own teams. Any failure to acknowledge these issues can become a system silencer.

For example, in healthcare, I have seen nurses in emergency rooms, operating rooms, and critical care areas snub the nurses who have less specialty experience working on medical floors. I have seen physicians do the same. Then there is always the complicated dynamic of how physicians and nurses treat each other. It

all comes down to what is socially constructed as “in-group” versus “out-group” membership.

Certain industries have trends. Healthcare will probably always experience in-group and out-group behaviors between different care providers. Academia is known to judge tenured versus non-tenured or PhD versus EdD. Those in traditional law firms deal with the dynamics of who makes partner versus who is an associate attorney or who is perceived as a rainmaker.

Somewhere along the line, it becomes a social norm to demonstrate ostracizing behavior toward those who have not earned the same certifications, experience, or education as others to be at the big kid’s table. Somehow, we have adopted this perspective that it is okay to treat people at lower pay grades differently than we would people who make more money. Again, these are all socially constructed behaviors that need to be named and deconstructed more precisely before systems, cultures, and climate can sustainably change.

## FAILURES

Aside from these structural complexities that many organizations share, what about the issue of how failure is handled? How many organizations spend time deciding what they want normal to look like when a leader makes a mistake or a function fails to meet a goal. Often this is a reactive phenomenon that contributes to climate—the prevailing trend.

It is funny how one or two instances in an organization’s history become part of the climate and then become repeated or feared. Shannon, the research participant who is quoted at the beginning of this chapter, shared a specific example of this. She was a director in a STEM organization and was asked to take on a controversial project that required relocation and taking over a failing department. She delivered the project in the expected time frame, got positive reviews, a good bonus, additional stock, and the monetary things that would suggest she hit a home run. Her senior vice

president relocated her back to the original home office, but the climate she came back to was dramatically different.

I came back to this really weird atmosphere with little things at first. I was a director, but I walked in, and every other person that was a director had an office, and I didn't. I had a cubicle. And just little subtle things started to happen. They had this big director's meeting where everybody was invited to fly in from all over the world that was a director level and above, and I was not invited to that meeting. And it was, what's the word? It was devastating. There was no explanation given.

This dynamic went on for months, and she continuously questioned her value in the organization. When she eventually sat down with her SVP after almost a year of minimizing and silencing experiences, her boss asked: "Well, how's it going for you?"

I said, "Honestly, it's not going great. I feel like this has been a really strange year filled with mixed messages, and I don't understand what's going on." And she told me that she felt that the launch of my project was a miss, even though the department is still there and I stabilized it. She asked, "Do you feel like you're being punished?" And I said, "Yeah."

Shannon shared with me that her SVP agreed that in theory, she was being punished, marginalized, and pushed aside. She described it as feeling silenced for a year and made miserable. The SVP said to her, "But now you've paid your dues."

Gulp! One could argue this SVP did something pretty horrible or we can say that there is a climate of "punishing" people for mistakes in this organization. My participant saw it both ways. Once the SVP admitted that she indeed was making her pay her dues, Shannon decided to leave. She did not want to work for an organization which admittedly punished people for perceived misses.

Having worked for almost twenty years in healthcare, I am familiar with the meetings that debrief mistakes. It is supposed to

be a safe session where the systems are analyzed to assess what the failures were that led to a bad patient outcome. It was far from a perfect system, and I heard many complaints about how people felt in those meetings. But at least there was a formal process in place for mistakes. The meeting was supposed to analyze the systems that allowed a human being to do what they eventually did. The mechanical, technical, process steps, and protocols were examined first and then later, the behavior of the employee was considered. The intent was to identify what made a mistake possible.

I rarely see other organizations take such formal steps to debrief and learn from mistakes or perceived failures. Instead, I see reactive FHBs making decisions based on their own meaning-making. These reactions then become legends, and a new element of climate is created that sends a strong message of “Be careful—do not make a mistake, lest you be punished.” It is remarkable how these climates and cultures far survive the people who may have been responsible for birthing them.

Perhaps Shannon’s SVP started something brand new by punishing a female leader. I doubt it! I believe she mimicked a leadership behavior that had been replicated multiple times in that organization’s history. Nothing is worse than feeling punished; not only does it make one feel adolescent, but it also calls into question what forgiveness, restoration, and grace look like in an organization. What good can come from penalizing someone without explanation for months on end? It creates damage that cannot be repaired, and female leaders who experience this can rarely recover from that silencing experience and stay in place to lead.

Systems, culture, and climate are a bit slippery. It is hard to pin the dynamic on any one person, and yet over and over, I hear women in leadership struggle to describe how these unnamed dynamics make them feel silenced. I spoke to an attorney named Katrina with an impressive background and long tenure with the Justice Department who said, “I almost didn’t realize I was silenced because when I started here, it was such a foreign environ-

ment to be here in Washington, D.C. It wasn't until years later that I realized what was going on."

The solution is not fast or straightforward; silencing encounters, especially at the system level, can go on for decades. However, nothing can be done effectively without discussing the atmospheric pressure in new ways. Organizations can modify existing cultures and climates when conversations identify what has traditionally been unspoken. Power, failures, punishment, in-group and out-group behavior, norms, and systems that do not serve leaders or employees need to be discussed.

Organizations need to keep asking one fundamental question: *What conversations need to surface?* There may be many. Perhaps discussing who has the most currency (meaning voice and followers) needs to be a starting place. This should be addressed, not to shame those with currency, but to determine who is absent. Who needs to increase their currency, and what can be done to foster less silence?

The challenge is, how do those conversations surface and occur without causing more damage?

This question is tackled with conversation rituals in chapter 7. But before we leave the issues that create or sustain silencing, we need first to address how the silenced play into this phenomenon. This book is not about villainizing any particular person or group; however, there needs to be a better understanding of those who self-silence and how they contribute to dynamics that are already riddled with complexity.





## 6

# WHEN WOMEN SILENCE THEMSELVES

*I allowed him to make me feel less than.*

—Hospital CEO

**K**ate has an animated and warm personality. She is the kind of person who leverages her silence to connect and use level three listening with ease. She makes eye contact, nods her head, uses your name a lot, and shares stories in a way that makes you feel like a character in the narrative. In the course of the interview, I watched her transition from a lively animated healthcare executive with voice, tone, and projection, to a woman with a scrunched posture, using quiet sounds. I asked her at the end of the discussion if she realized she started whispering or if there was awareness of what she was doing with her body. She was not fully conscious of the shifts in her voice or presence.

Whether you are an emerging female leader or a PhD, decade-in-role, or CEO, all women struggle with some form of self-silencing. I mentioned in chapter 2 that sometimes I will get queries from people curious about my research who question the confidence or efficacy of the women in my study. (By the way, my list of people to smack upside the head is not just for those who created organization charts in the 1800s.) I have researched and coached hundreds of women, and I think they are all brilliant in different

ways. Do I also think they, like me, suffer from self-doubt? Of course! But we need to explore why, which involves taking a short, high-level journey back in time to demonstrate how self-silencing might actually be in a female's DNA.

## HISTORY

In 1916, Reverend Charles Courtenay, a man of the church in England, wrote a 400-page treatise on the subject of silence. He argued that silence was more than just the absence of sound. There were historical points and descriptions of how silence has been used systematically, religiously, and politically throughout time to disciplinarily control groups of people, especially women and children. His work provided multiple perspectives that have been built upon over the decades.<sup>1</sup>

Within his text, he named a practice of silencing women or those who were considered incessantly talkative, and advocated that disciplinary silence was problematic.

What was he talking about when he discussed ending disciplinary silence? Let me be clear; he was not talking about ending the gentle rebuttals directed toward women to quiet down. He was referencing all the atrocious ways the tongue was screwed by iron nails, seared at the tip, or bridled to keep women in a forced state of silence.

First recorded in 1567, the Scold's Bridle was designed for women. "They prepared two little irons, between which the tongue was screwed, which, being seared at the tip, would swell to such a degree as to become immovable and incapable of being drawn back."<sup>2</sup> Today, there is a church in England, Walton on Thames, with a display case hosting a Scold's Bridle, dated 1633. The inscription reads, *Chester presents Walton with a bridle, to curb women's tongues that talk too idle.*<sup>3</sup>

Although these torturous practices were introduced in Europe, there are remnants that made it to America. There is also evidence of this device being used in Virginia with slaves. More likely, the

New World resorted to other forms of disciplinary silence, like placing people in the stocks as a form of humiliation.

Reverend Courtenay went far to shame the hundreds of years of physical abuse but stopped short because he continued to refer to women and children as the primary offenders of “obnoxious loquaciousness”—otherwise known as distasteful chatter. In that era, it was a socially constructed belief that women and children were incessant disruptions to the greater sex. While he shamed forceful silencing of women, he also wrote that graciously silent women are worthy of praise and suggested that more credit be given to the women who silence themselves.

His work drew attention to something that needed to end—torture (*yay*). Society then shifted and replaced the physical restraints of silencing with psychological ones in regard to a woman’s appropriate use of voice. Let me quote him, “But a talking woman is an awful judgment, and a mystery, and an oppression.”<sup>4</sup>

The silencing of women has been a socially acceptable construct worldwide. Whether you believe in creation, the big bang, or evolution—whatever you consider the start—that is how long women have struggled to have a voice or a place at the table. But that struggle was not always consistent. One could argue that women’s roles and abilities to hold power have ebbed and flowed. During our first few centuries outside of the Greek–Roman cultures, there are many historical accounts of women ruling, fighting side by side with their men as warriors, and acting as political and military leaders. On the other hand, we also see cultural perspectives from the ancient world that view women as property without choice or voice. And the medieval church openly degraded women as weak, hysterical, and open to temptations.

The overall Puritan belief in New England culture was that women were more susceptible to damnation, and their souls were unprotected in their weak and vulnerable bodies. Diagrams of conception found during these periods showed women as passive, empty vessels that hosted babies as a result of receiving a man’s seed.<sup>5</sup> When women acted in a way that was contrary to socially accepted norms, they were punished. The majority of the people

accused of witchcraft in Europe between 1300 and the late 1600s were women. It is estimated that tens of thousands of women and girls were executed during this European craze. Despite the longing to be separate, societal trends followed into the colonies with the finale in 1693. The Salem Witch Trials in colonial Massachusetts occurred and 200 women were accused, with twenty innocent women being executed.<sup>6</sup>

The eighteenth century brought little change for women in the United States, and all established laws pertained to white men with almost everything defining females or non-whites as subordinate. Women had access to more of the printed word but were rarely able to write or publish. Colleges excluded them, and they were barred from being professionals. Their role was in the home supporting their husbands. There were few restrictions on men's cruelty, and husbands could beat their wives as long as the switch was not thicker than his thumb (the rule of thumb).<sup>7</sup>

The nineteenth century brought in a wave of change, but evolutions in American law were painfully slow and occurred state by state. In 1837, Ohio allowed four women to enroll in Oberlin College. Oregon, in 1850, allowed unmarried women to own land. Most states up to this point only allowed women to own and operate land if their husbands were incapacitated. The Wyoming territory was the first to grant women the right to vote in 1869. In 1882, wife-beating was deemed a crime in the state of Maryland. These are just a few examples of the incremental changes made in this century that at the time were significant as they required women to rebel against the men they were dependent on. It was also a shared belief among men that educated women would abandon their purity—they were weak and needed to be controlled; however, this oppression began to shift.<sup>8</sup>

In the twentieth century, we saw progress with women that was nothing short of miraculous. The campaign for women's suffrage that started in 1848 met so much opposition; it took seventy-two years for women to get their right to vote in 1920. They had more access to education, improved living conditions, and began having smaller families with access to birth control. Women rarely

worked outside the home, except during war times, because housework was consuming. However, by the 1960s, part-time work was much more available. New technology, like washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and refrigerators made it easier to take care of the house and have a service industry position, which was the most common opportunity for women.<sup>9</sup>

The collective voice of women that had been silenced for centuries was now emerging in the mid 1900s in unprecedented ways.

Primary research on female leadership emerged in the 1970s. This was a time when women were rising away from the traditional service roles of quiet nurse, teacher, and secretary, only holding traditional roles as 38 percent of the workforce.<sup>10</sup> Women no longer needed to publish their academic work or business contributions under pseudo names so their readers would believe they were men. Women were finding voice and breaking into industries and positions that were previously unavailable.

Finally!

That was an embarrassingly brief review of female history, but there is a point.

If I take the conservative approach, it only took 2,000 years for women to escape the most egregious forms of disciplinary silence, *Euf!*

Despite how far we have come, the psychological silencing remains. We have not shaken the “woman’s place” mind-set that is so deeply ingrained in how both genders think about the workplace and a woman’s value. According to psychologist Dr. Charlynn Ruan, “The most effective and insidious method of silencing women is through subtle methods, where the woman feels shame about herself as a person.”<sup>11</sup>

I love Martin Luther King Jr. and his powerful words. One of my favorite quotes of his is about bootstraps. “It’s all right to tell a man to lift himself by his own bootstraps, but it is a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps.” When we believe that our black brothers and sisters of today are 100 percent free from the bonds of four centuries of slavery, we are severely blinded by our white privilege.

In a similar vein, when those with voice currency ask women those casual questions like, “Hey, why don’t you speak up?” or “Can you get over it and be more assertive?” they often miss the point and unconsciously skip over 2,000 years of silencing context.

I only had one participant share that she was physically silenced. She called it the face rake. A male colleague would literally run his fingers down her face to get her to stop talking. Outside of that, no female expressed any physical examples of silencing as we have seen throughout history. But how does the silencing seep into our cells and continue to hold us hostage? When we have gone centuries without having a voice, how do women shrug off the past and accept that their voice is fully allowed and welcome? It is often hard to believe we have full freedom to express as female leaders when the organization structures and social constructs continue to send messages that suggest the “good ol’ boys club” is still an active influencer. Even when men do not silence, women will step in and do it for them. Women self-silence, not because we want to keep ourselves down, but most in part because our tongues are still healing.

## MY RESEARCH

The concept of self-silencing emerged in 1991 with Dana Crowley Jack’s prominent research that correlated women’s loss of self in relationships to depression. Her work has been built upon in hundreds of ways, myself included. She developed a silencing the self scale (STSS) that has been used in over seventy-five peer-reviewed journal articles. Most of these studies are focused on gender and depression in the social world.<sup>12</sup>

In 1995, another researcher modified the scale for a workplace setting, and it was this tool, Silencing the Self Scale—Work (STSS-W) that I used in my research with female leaders.<sup>13</sup> The tool was not a significant part of my work; I used it as a data point to supplement my interviews. Qualitative research is complicated and exhausting. I do not think many social scientists understand

what they are getting into until they are drowning in data. I chose to use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as my qualitative method because I believed it was the approach that best answered my research question.

Stay with me here; I have to cover some boring academic stuff before I can get to the valuable lesson learned.

My research question was, “How do women in leadership who feel silenced manage, and move to purposeful voice and voice efficacy?” Secondary questions covered in my study explored who (or what) silenced them, how were they silenced, and the impact of silencing on them as individuals and leaders. There were three primary phases to the research. First, the background on how they were silenced, with the identification of silencing sources, was explored. Second, the emotional, physical, cognitive, and spiritual descriptions of feeling silenced were captured. Last, the process they experienced as they moved from feeling silenced to purposeful voice was profiled and understood.

With my IPA methodology, I wanted to answer two fundamental questions:

1. How has this person understood this phenomenon?
2. What does this mean for this person, in this context?

The analysis required not just generating the participant’s account but also surfacing meaning and commonality that went beyond mere description. The interpretation part of this approach suggests that something else is deliberately revealed in the data. The overall outcome of the qualitative data is a renewed insight into the phenomenon that is informed by the female leader’s experience. The results create enough understanding of the essence of the lived experience for a reader to walk away feeling as if he or she better comprehend something.

Any good researcher needs to approach their work without an answer in mind. If you believe you already understand a phenomenon, you will miss important things in the narrative that create a different perspective. Although I went in with a sense of curiosity

and openness, I had a preconceived notion of what participants would focus on and what I would walk away knowing. I believed wholeheartedly that the last phase of the research would be the most prominent. I planned to receive a lot of information on the recovery process, and I wanted to be able to outline what voice efficacy could look like after a period of feeling silenced while in leadership.

*Sheesh*—I was so wrong!

I wanted to understand the recovery process. To me, the recovery was the most critical—without it, what is the point of studying silencing? And yet, something emerged that I did not expect. Many of my participants were so steeped in silencing and as a result of that, they were not entirely themselves, fully leading, or 100 percent committed to staying in leadership. They could not speak to the recovery process because they had not gotten there yet.

Instead of the STSS-W being a supplemental quantitative tool, it actually became somewhat of an indicator that later surfaced a typology of women who experience silencing. The typology is fully covered in chapter 9.

Two critical findings emerged in the pattern of data:

1. Recovering from a silencing experience is long and complicated—it is a nasty debilitating virus;
2. The more women self-silence, the higher chance they have of leaving their leadership position.

This is a problem!

Women hold less than 15 percent of executive roles. Only 5 percent of women hold CEO roles in S&P 500 companies. The reality is, the world cannot afford to lose any more women in leadership; there are too few of us already.

Once my data began to show me that self-silencing and opting out of leadership were potentially connected, I decided to take a deeper dive into understanding more about this phenomenon.



## HOW WOMEN SELF-SILENCE

For those readers who love numbers, please note that I am not going to litter my book with the chi-square statistics. If that is your thing, we need to talk. This book is intended to shed light on a correlated phenomenon that many women, not just some, but many, wrestle with but are reluctant to discuss. Once we begin to shift our understanding and bring it into the public light, we can talk in new ways that scatter darkness and shepherd healing.

Quick side note, I did not try to assess the depression levels of the women in my study. That was not in my scope or expertise. Instead, I wanted to understand how female leaders viewed their relationship with the organization and what they were willing to do to maintain that relationship. What lengths would they go to self-silence to stay in good standing with their company?

I have had conversations with people who try to summarize my research down to one sentence. “No one can silence a female leader; it all comes down to them silencing themselves.” I suppose there is some truth to this; unless someone has driven a spike through my tongue. At a basic level, I am choosing to speak or not speak. I am deciding whether or not I let the external factors of systems and relationship influence me and my use of voice.

But there is more to this. Self-silencing is far more complicated, and when it is oversimplified, it can become a silencer. Women need to know their experience is not quickly summarized and then dismissed.

I remember conducting a presentation to a group of female attorneys in New York. Shortly after I finished speaking and lunch began, one of the attendees approached me. She was a partner in a large successful firm. With tears in her eyes, she thanked me for finally giving her insight into something she was struggling with for years. She did not have the label or language for her experience and felt like she was always spinning with a lot of self-incriminating behavior. Once she heard me describe all the elements of silencing, something clicked for her, and she had the opportunity to view her experience differently. No woman will get to that place

of awareness and healing if things are too bundled, simplified, or broad-brushed.

But let's, for a moment, accept the truth that no one can silence me but me. I am the only one with the agency to determine what comes out of my mouth and when. Let's, for a moment, accept that no system or relationship can silence me without force unless I let it.

If we accept this premise, let's unpack what it means to self-silence. Here is where I return to Dana Jack's extraordinary research. Using her scale, she created four categories that give insight into the different ways we as women may do this to ourselves.

1. Externalized Self-Perception: How do women judge themselves against external standards?
2. Care as Self-Sacrifice: How do women sacrifice self to preserve relationships with others?
3. Silence the Self: How do women inhibit actions or expression to avoid conflict or loss of a relationship?
4. Divided Self: How are women divided when they have to be compliant with expectations—how do they manage the internal emotion?<sup>12</sup>

## EXTERNALIZED SELF-PERCEPTION

First, when we base our perception of self on external factors, it can be a mad crazy world. In adult development theories, researchers suggest vertical human growth occurs when we move away from the socialized world and how it defines self into the self-authoring stage where we determine our vision, strategies, and perceptions that are free from the judgment of others. I believe this is all true.

If I am always worried about what people think of me, I will lose my own sense of self, and with that, I will begin to silence my

own voice to belong. It is almost impossible to measure up to everyone else's expectations and still be me.

We are never free from expectations regardless of what level of leadership we aspire. When female leaders are self-silencing, it is often to ensure they do not fall out of a relationship with people they perceive to hold power over their success or employment. And yes, sometimes that power can be unhealthy, and women may find themselves virally silenced with constant mental spin, deficit thinking, isolation, and disconnection from self. They may need to exercise great care in how they message things, respond to people, or explain essential aspects of their work.

One of my participants in the study is a nursing director; she admitted she was silencing herself based on external perceptions and said she wrestled with providing on-the-spot feedback, having the right words at the right time, and consistently wanting to be perceived as credible in her role. I do not think what she articulated is different than what most female leaders desire. We all wish to come across as well-spoken and credible, but so often we let someone else determine the measuring stick for success. When we pass that power over to someone else entirely, it most certainly will lead to a lot of poorly stated statements and a loss of self.

The last question on the STSS-W is, *I never seem to measure up to the standards I set for myself*. If participants answered with a high score, they were asked to list the standards. Overall, I had seventy-nine open-ended statements from participants after they completed the STSS-W. I found that 11 percent were specific to technical skills. Some women noted they were struggling with spreadsheets, making sense of their budget, or completing reports on time. The technical aspects, in general, were minimal. Most women did not describe technical competencies as being problematic in regard to meeting expectations.

However, 56 percent of the answers were specific to vague standards. Here are some of the statements I collected:

- The body of work I feel I should be able to accomplish is never enough

- A standard of handling business like a man, without incorporating any of the gifts of my gender
- I'm not smart enough
- Being good enough (smart enough, accomplished enough, productive enough)

The remaining 33 percent were statements specific to personal standards they felt they could never meet:

- I'm not thin enough
- I'm not involved enough in my kid's schooling
- I cannot figure out what will make people like me—I ask myself daily, as embarrassing as that is to admit
- Taking care of myself without guilt

An executive I interviewed who worked for the United States Postal Service for over twenty years, with a broad scope of authority overseeing a six-billion-dollar division, wrote that she believed she was not creative enough, capable enough, and felt she did not add value to her organization. When she left her executive role, and opted out of a big job with a big title, she took a position that was comfortable but far below her abilities. I see this as a tremendous loss.

*Enough!* This is the word that keeps surfacing in the written comments. When women do not feel or think they measure up to standards they set for themselves (or are set for others), they say they are not enough. What does it mean to be enough? When women self-silence, this is a question they wrestle with often, and their judgment toward self can be demonizing. It seeps into their core and impacts their health and leadership.

## **CARE AS SELF-SACRIFICE**

That leads to care as self-sacrifice; of all the subcategories on the instrument, none has as much statistical correlation to opting out

of leadership as sacrificing self-care. When women see their own needs as selfish and make choices that are contrary to what they really want, to make other people happy, it builds up a level of toxin and contributes to the silencing virus.

Women who strongly self-silence see any form of taking care of self first as a form of selfishness. Many named selfishness as something that should be avoided at all times. I cover more of this issue in chapter 9 when I unpack what self-care really means and all the ways women are getting it wrong.

## INHIBIT AND DIVIDE

The last two ways women self-silence are when they inhibit expressions to maintain peace, or they feel divided between what they express and what they may be experiencing internally.

I have certain friends who rarely have a private thought. Everything they think or feel is talked about. I pretty much always know what goes on in their heads. I have other people in my life who are direct as sunlight, and if they do not like something, they have no problem sharing their reactions. I enjoy my relationships with these individuals because I always know where I stand. They do not mince words—they rarely self-silence.

I also have friends, and I put myself in this category, who live productive and colorful lives in their heads. They are less expressive and tend to reflect before they speak. If I am not careful, I can be perceived as too cautious with my words and leave people thinking I want to say more, but have chosen not. Believe me when I say—this is a good thing! If I said everything I thought—life for me might not be so pleasant.

Everyone needs to show discernment and use the filter God built in our brains before we blurt something out. I sometimes worry that the collective filter has broken as I see so much coarse rhetoric expressed by all generations, both male and female, on social media. Politics has created cracks in our decorum, and I look at both sides of the aisle engaging in dialogue that they never

imagined participating in several years ago. It can be quite disturbing. Sorry, I digress . . .

Back to quiet personalities; I have had attendees bring up this aspect of self-silencing when I speak at conferences. They ask how a woman's nature may just be quiet and that perhaps some women are reflective thinkers and may not fit in the category of feeling silenced.

Yes, we all have our different preferences for how we engage. Some people prefer introversion while others, extraversion. Feeling silenced cuts across all forms of personality. I can be quiet or reserved and still believe I have a full agency with my voice. I know when I speak, people will listen, engage, and follow. My style may use less expression, but that does not mean I am feeling silenced by an internal or external locus of power that is often felt by women who identify as feeling silenced.

In fact, I have experienced women who feel silenced doing the reverse of what one might expect. They often use more language, more expressions, talk louder, and faster because they are fighting against the feeling of silencing. Others self-silence because keeping the peace is more critical; they believe their relationship with an individual or their organization is at risk if they continue to express, even when they sincerely desire to communicate and share.

Often women are not able to fully see what is happening when they self-silence; it is not always a conscious decision.

## CONSCIOUSNESS

I reviewed several models in my study of the academic literature when it came to withholding voice. There are three categories that I think are relevant.<sup>14</sup> First, there is a conscious withheld voice—this is a form of self-silencing. I want to speak—I have ideas, suggestions, declarations, and other expressions, but I choose to remain silent. I am self-silencing, and the locus of control is inter-

nal. I am aware of what I want, and I am aware that I am choosing not to say it.

Another form of an internal locus of control is when I am unconsciously repressing my voice. I find a lot of my female clients wrestling with this. They may hire me as their coach to work on confidence, managing up, building a capable team, improving communication, and so on. All these objectives are often the veneer behind something deeper that they may not be able to bring to the surface until we get deeper into our work together. Behind some of those aims is the issue they have unconsciously repressed. They may not always be aware of how divided they feel or how conflict-avoidant they have become. Once the consciousness emerges that they have unknowingly been silencing themselves, it can be freeing, or it can become even more painful.

Having a consciousness sometimes intensifies the difficulty. We now see something in daylight that was once hidden. We notice things in new ways. This puts us at a place of choice. I can choose to stop my own silencing and use voice; take some risks to influence personal change and begin to heal. Or I may decide to seek new opportunities with hopes that a fresh start will create a new, more effective me. However, merely making a change does not bring voice recovery. The work to heal requires much more.

There are two ways to view internal locus of control; there is a conscious and an unconscious silencing. There is also the external locus of control, which is the conscious suppressed voice. The word suppressed is different than repressed or withhold. When I am suppressed, I feel my agency is lost because of something going on outside of me. This is an example of how self-silencing gets twisted and wrapped around relationships or systems that silence. I am fully aware of what is happening, but that awareness does not always lead to believing options are available to use voice. To speak up may lead me to lose something—a relationship, my position in the organization, or something else. Sometimes that fear is unfounded, other times, it is not.

I once had the experience of being told by my silencer that I should not speak in meetings—that she did not want to hear me

talk about certain things. This was an external locus of control, and I knew if I violated it, I could further jeopardize my relationship with her. I chose to silence myself around some critical work and the consciousness of what I was doing brutalized me. I go back to the words of one of my committee members who wrote the book, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*.

“The relationship of language—and silence—to deprivation is profound. What happens when one needs to—or should—speak and is cut off from the possibility of speaking? What kind of deprivation does the silenced body experience?”<sup>15</sup>

Self-silencing is a complex phenomenon that goes as deep as our DNA. The fixers in our life will advise us to speak up, speak out, break the silence, file a complaint, let it go, or get out of our own way. Until we can get clear on what is happening internally versus externally and untangle what has been knotted for weeks, months, years, and in some cases, decades, those words will bounce off the pain and not work for the virally silenced female leader. Women have to determine where the locus of control resides; where it was born and how it morphed into something unrecognizable.

I do not think any female leader approaches her leadership platform consciously choosing to be silenced. She is silenced in so many ways that she does not always realize how it has happened or is happening. I believe it is imperative, though, for female leaders to examine their own voice. Where do they have currency and where is it missing? How are they sustaining relationships that make them feel repressed? How are they responding to systems that silence with voice, acquiescence, or denial? What is their willingness to regain their agency?

The next chapter unpacks new perspectives to examine voice and speech acts.



## HOW VOICE IS A SCREECH OR A SANCTIFICATION

*I think I could have just been more assertive. It comes back to listening to my gut and trusting my gut, but I stopped trusting it. I think that's one of the side effects of silencing. When you go, and you give it that first great attempt and even a second great attempt and somebody says, "there, there," head pat, "off you go, just do it the way I told you," it's really demotivating.*

—Regional Leader stationed in the Asia Pacific

**N**ancy is one of those women who naturally speaks poetically. She is thoughtful, discerning, and warm in her use of language; her cadence of speech is natural to listen to and is integrated with story, metaphor, and deep awareness. She is an executive leader with a marketing and writing background turned leadership coach who came into my research with a level of pain in her story that emphasized the relentlessness of silencing.

Her experience was relational, and she felt silenced by certain men in power who rarely acknowledged her contributions. That long, difficult period took a toll on her adrenal glands, and for her to heal all her domains, she opted out of her leadership role and took a significant break. Fast forward many years, she has and is learning to channel her understanding of self and healing of voice

in her work with other leaders. When I asked her to describe her use of voice now, I heard the following:

Choppy at best. It's a funny thing to even think about voice because when you've been a writer for a long time, that's where it gets used a lot, your voice, cultivating your voice, finding your voice. When I have the time to go into my cocoon and weave together something and put it out in the written word, it's good, and I feel like I've articulated and expressed what I wanted to and it often, not always, but often will have the intended impact on the reader.

Let's be honest; voice is an intimate thing. When someone honors your voice or compliments your use of speech—it is like praising your soul. I also think most leaders agree that having time and reflection often produces better communication. We have to be in tune with ourselves, so we can be our best self when we talk. However, our thinking tends to be about the words we want to use and how we want to say them. Rarely do we stop and reflect on our vocal cords nestled deep within the regions of our necks. We probably do not focus on how they vibrate, harmonize, or bring forth sound. We are instruments of noise, expression, poetry, art, and action. When we speak in specific ways—life changes, relationships shift, things end or begin, we produce elements of our life through our whispers or our shouts.

I know many people who are less expressive verbally but can weave a masterpiece together on paper. Those who are few with words tend to be vibrant when they write. I also know those who are profusely expressive and struggle to write a paragraph. Sometimes the connections between our brain, the vocal cords, and the hand holding a pencil get disconnected. Things get choppy.

This is a strange phenomenon, and it reflects how we may know something at an expert level but cannot say it or write it down. When I lead workshops, I will sometimes demonstrate this by asking everyone to take their pen and create an ampersand on a piece of paper, not looking at their phone. They all know what it

looks like (&) but we have not translated that knowledge into ability and with a lot of effort they at best create a treble sign or a sloppy version of the real thing. We have to stop assuming that knowing creates saying. We also have to stop assuming a shared knowledge of what we believe is obvious.

All of us struggle when we perceive that common sense is missing. It is widely known; it is clear; all signs point to the answer. How can you not see or think about what I see and think? I wonder about this regularly as my husband and I live life together on parallel paths. Sometimes we intersect and tangle over things that I do not understand. How could he come to a different conclusion than me when all the conditions are present to suggest there should be only one way of noticing something? Especially when it is painfully obvious (at least to me).

Here lies the problem that many fallible human beings face, and within leadership, it is compounded. We are not overt enough with our language. We make assumptions or say just enough to appease our own internal needs. In other cases, we overexert and provide too much context, and our purposeful voice gets lost in the myriad of expression. One of the challenges leaders (and quite honestly, people in general) wrestle with is the illusion that communication has occurred. Voice *really* can be a screech or sanctification.

Consider the loquacious leader who likes to speak with far too many examples, details, or context. What about the taciturn who do not share enough? Our leadership audience has minimal appetite for either style. To be successful in communication, which is key to healing from silencing, one needs to understand all the distinctions with voice just as they do with silence. Speaking is rarely enough.

It is rare to find a leader these days who is also not a worker. Many of my clients and the women in this research described how they not only had large divisions to lead, but they also had their own deliverables and projects to see through to completion. Their hands may have been buried in Excel spreadsheets, Word documents, or any number of databases. At times leadership results are

tangible—one can pick up their work, hold it, review it, and evaluate it. Most of the time, the work is created at levels below their box on the org chart, and a leader's primary task is to use communication, written or verbal, to direct, explain, or facilitate the work.

A leader's work is through language. Up until now, most of the material in this book is about the phenomenon of feeling silenced and the distinctions of this phenomenon. It has been mentioned that voice does not just emerge automatically with the flip of the switch, nor is the remedy just to start speaking up. Female leaders need to be conscious of their choices with voice and show discernment in the types of speech acts they employ.

## SPEECH ACTS

We can be effective communicators without any background knowledge or theory. However, when we start to understand language distinctions or speech acts, it helps us become more aware of our purpose and intention when we talk. This is key for all leaders, especially those who are trying to overcome the silencing virus.

Speech acts originated in the linguistic and philosophical bodies of scholarly literature dating back to 1962, and means to perform a language act or to speak something into being with intention and purpose. Those two words, intention and purpose, are key. The philosophical founder of the Speech Act Theory, J. L. Austin, is most widely known for his work titled, *How to Do Things with Words*. Language is not just expression, utterances or talk—it is also speaking something into existence.<sup>1</sup>

There are three main speech acts known as locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Try saying that three times fast! A locutionary speech act simply means I am saying something that carries a shared meaning with someone else. Locution is a phrase or sentence that holds a vocabulary word and some type of structural grammar. Babble is not locutionary if another human being did not hear actual words that make sense.

To be locutionary, let's talk about something that at least half of us do not enjoy—small talk!

When I walk into the bank to make a deposit and hear: *How are you?* *How's your day?* *Big plans for the weekend?* I typically respond with *fine, good, and nope!* People asking these questions do not usually expect a full account of my health, family dynamics, the morning I had with my daughter, or the housework that needs to be accomplished on Saturday. There is an assumed knowledge that these questions are a polite way to form a greeting.

I am asked, "How are you?"

I say, "Fine, thanks."

I then ask them, "How are you?"

They say, "Great, thank you."

And we are done!

When leaving, if that same someone calls out to me and says, "Have a great day!" I do not leave thinking, "Why did I not think of this? I am now going to have a great day, and I will start this great day right now!"

Nope, none of that. In most cases, an exchange of this sort does not create any intention or action with either one of us. At its best, this is a performing act *of* saying something. Our lives are full of this type of thing, and it rarely brings value other than to remind us we are not alone on the planet.

The second type of speech act is illocutionary, and here, things start to change. The illocution is an intentional utterance. I am now performing action *in* saying something. I have an agenda when I speak, and I have the intention of producing meaningful expression. We are moving away from talk that is small and entering into conversations that make things happen. Here we have a big bucket full of distinctions, and each is critical.

## ILLOCUTIONARY SPEECH ACTS

There are others who have researched this category of language. Some believe there are four or five speech acts, and others who

argue six. Some see particular distinctions belonging together, and I see them differently. I think everyone agrees that each speech act is significant and necessary for people to communicate effectively.

Based on my study and work with leaders, I believe that there are seven specific Illocutionary Speech Acts that people need to heed and leverage. In numerology, seven has a sense of wholeness, luck, or importance. Right at the start of the Bible with the creation story, the number seven is identified as being complete. When we use these speech acts in a coordinated way, giving attention to each category, we have a complete and purposeful voice. However, I find that rarely are all seven used effectively.

These speech acts are listed in an order that may help with recall. When you use all seven, you possess an RV-CARD.<sup>2</sup> I know it is a bit odd, but it does stand out as easy to remember. Recreational vehicles are expensive to fill up with gas and depending on what size and type, the gas tank can hold anywhere from 25–150 gallons. The last thing you want is to start up your RV and then let it sit idly wasting fuel.

## PASSIVE SPEECH ACTS

There are two types of idle speech acts that do not generate much action but are still considered a performing act of language.

1. Representative—there is a truth to the statement; it is factual and not opinion-based. *Her shirt is black. I spent five dollars; or a desk has four legs.* This type of speech act suggests that there are correct judgments that can be made about the evidence, or that we are representing a truth. In a perfect world, everyone agrees on the facts. I often find that leaders describe their opinions as fact and expect others to agree. It rarely works. The fact belongs to the item being discussed and has little to do with the person hearing it.

When a representative phrase is used, the thing is represented as itself.

2. View—many practitioners and scholars call this type of speech act an assessment. Given the meaning of that word within healthcare and education, I find it a bit misleading. Specific industries refer to assessments (otherwise referred to as test scores, medical evaluations, etc.) as factual data. I think this confuses and I have switched to another word. A view is my opinion that stems from my psychological state—it is an expression. *My boss does not have good relationship skills; the program will never work; or, that was a great presentation.* Most individuals use their views as their primary language choice. We are in a world filled with description. We have beliefs, ideas, feelings, or perspectives that are all unique, and we tend to express them ALL THE TIME! As leaders, we hope our expressions will be a competent form of leadership, but our views alone rarely inspire followership. In a perfect world, we moderate our expression of views and use other speech acts more.

## **ACTION-ORIENTED SPEECH ACTS**

The following five acts of speech take your RV out of idle and make it travel with surprising speed. These acts take a leader's words and propel his or her voice into a purposeful and effective space creating a sense of currency. These acts transition a leader from passivity to action.

3. Commissive (commitment statement)—here we are making a promise, threat, vow, or offer. I will be home by 5 pm; I will read your proposal; or, I will meet your deadline. These are all expressions of commitment. In a perfect world, commitments are not vague or buried in other speech acts. I see an offer as a commissive statement because if I offer help and someone accepts my offer, I need to follow through as if

it is a promise. I see so few willing to make promises. We may not be able to honor every commitment made, but we certainly need to manage expectations and be ready to make commitments.

4. Apology—a regretful acknowledgment of a failure or offense. I realize I hurt you, and I am sorry; please forgive me for that unkind statement; or, I failed to acknowledge your accomplishment, and I owe you an apology. Ideally, we only apologize when we are genuinely sorry. Some leaders apologize for everything and may even make their bodies small when they make a directive or a request. Bad idea! Overusing apologies diminishes leadership. Others will not apologize at any cost, and this too is problematic. In a perfect world, we only apologize when we are apologetic or remorseful. I believe everyone would live better lives if we learned to apologize more; especially since we are all fallible.
5. Requests—a person uses this act to express a desired outcome from another. Can I have these two weeks off? Please talk with me first before complaining to my boss. I am struggling; will you help me? It is hard for women to ask for help, and often we bury our requests in a lot of context and then feel resentment when the other person does not deliver. Some people will honor your requests in life; others will not. If there is no room to deny a request—in other words, you require them to do what you are asking—then it is a directive. When a request is not met, we can be disappointed, but in theory, should be able to accept it. A request and a directive are often lumped in the same bucket; they are frequently confused. In a perfect world, they are kept separate.
6. Directive—a person uses this speech act to get their listener(s) to actually act. Send me the report; clean your room; or, I expect you to copy me on that email. In a perfect world, a directive leaves little room for interpretation. Some leaders overuse this speech act, and others refrain entirely.



Both are mistakes. Leaders have the authority to be direct, and certain situations call for this act. It is okay to be unapologetic when used with intention. It can be sandwiched with some words of appreciation or a thank you, but be careful not to pillow a directive until it looks like a request that can be avoided.

7. Declarations—by stating something I create a different state or a change in conditions. You are hired; I want to break up; or, I am resetting standards for all meetings. In an ideal world, declarations cause immediate and sustaining behavioral change. They are different than directives, which are intended to generate action in others. A declaration creates a new normal, like when the wedding officiant pronounces you legally married or the judge announces a case dismissed.

## THE SANCTITY OF SEVEN

Those who are screechy with voice, lose their RV-CARD<sup>2</sup> (see figure 7.1).

They fail to remember all the different ways they can use speech. This loss shows up in a number of different ways. For instance, someone might:

- fail to pivot when the situation calls for directive language and instead pillow all their messages until the intended meaning is lost,
- rarely offer an apology after an offense and avoid anything that could be construed as a commitment,
- disguise a directive as a request and then criticize others when their expectations are not met,
- demonstrate a “why bother” attitude for fact checking because they believe everyone argues with the data anyway,



Figure 7.1. RV-CARD<sup>2</sup>

- offer up conditional help with little follow-through while they send subtle messages that they are too busy to promise anything,
- share their opinions as facts and act as if they are the smartest one in the room,
- only ask questions they already know are answered, or
- only talk about how things are wrong from every different angle (I call this problem admiration) and never make a request.

You may chuckle at all these examples but then sigh because you have seen some type of this reality in a lot of leadership over the years.

For leaders (not just women) to have an effective voice, there must be an intentional, performative function involved when speaking. In other words, you must know how to use the appropriate illocutionary speech act. Since no one will *everevereverever* remember that weird word, let alone be able to pronounce it, I am calling these speech acts in this bucket the Sanctifying Seven. If we remove the religious connotation from the word *sanctifies*, we find it means legitimate, pure, endorsed.

When leaders flex within the seven, they are more likely to use their voice in purposeful and effective ways. They do not stay too long in the description, nor do they only use representative language that is void of feeling. They are unapologetically clear in their directives.

I have been guilty of this along with so many women. We will make a request this way. “Hey sorry to bother you,” said with a sheepish smile and scrunched shoulders like a scolded puppy. “If it is not too much of a bother, can you please do this for me?”

Maybe, ladies, we need to stand tall when making a sanctifying request because (a) there is a business need, (b) you are a discerning leader and know what you are asking, (c) employees do not want to see us look small anymore. Quite honestly, I think they are getting sick of it.

When women feel silenced and have not moved to the other side where healing begins, they are likely to overly express their views. The need to describe and share can be overplayed in their desire to feel heard. Others may go quiet and be clipped in their responses, sharing very little. Others try a little bit of everything—apologies, requests, offers, or directives without success and it may be due to the fact they have not gotten intentional on what they are hoping to achieve and what outcome they seek. This leads to the last of the three big bucket speech acts, and like locutionary and illocutionary, it is another “cutionary” word.

## PERLOCUTIONARY SPEECH ACTS

A perlocutionary act is viewed at the level of its consequence. I am performing an act *by* saying something. Did my use of one of the sanctifying seven create my intended result? Are my listeners persuaded, convinced, motivated, focused, enlightened, inspired, grounded, or otherwise affected? I may have been purposeful in my choice of language but was I effective? Am I consistently effective? Does my use of voice bring me reliable results? I think you can start to see now that this is far more than just speaking up or breaking silence. To have a voice that is heard, women need to pay attention to the words, the action they want to create, and then notice what result they get. These are all unique distinctions that carry equal importance.

When female leaders feel silenced, things can feel choppy. They may have one success followed by a series of setbacks. Did my choice of words get me the results I was seeking or am I going to tailspin most of the night wondering if I could have said it differently? Sometimes women are so focused on their needs to persuade they lose sight of their tones and body language—the message gets lost, and the impact does not match the intention.

When I spoke to research participants about their silencing, they described intense confusion as to why they were so ineffective, when for so long in their leadership roles, they were success-

ful with engaged followers. Sometimes the virus can blind discernment with word choices leaving a sense of incompetence. I heard so many say, “I could not win. No matter what I said, it was always wrong.”

I think there are many reasons for things to go unheard and not everything is because of the female leader. Some people will not listen, no matter what. Maybe it is gender. Perhaps it is an unwillingness to give second or third chances. Maybe it is some other form of bias. Sometimes it is a system issue of only hearing certain types of boxes on the org chart. Or the organization is prone to ignore certain issues no matter what kind of voice is used to raise the concern. Part of the healing process when feeling silenced is to try and make sense of the context, dynamics, and personal contribution in the equation. This leads to the last area of voice that is just as significant as all the previously described speech acts.

## HEAD HEART GUT

I mentioned earlier in chapter 2 that I studied the “think” versus “feel” orientation with my participants. I had one particular African American woman in the study who was a senior director in a nonprofit agency. In the ninety-minute interview, she referenced what she thought or believed sixty-four times and only mentioned how she felt eight times. I remember at one point, she mentioned that earlier in her career, she had been advised not to wear her emotions on her sleeve. She said, “You know, it’s just who I am now. I am not an emotional person.”

I had another participant who identified as Asian reference what she felt sixty-eight times in a ninety-minute interview with thinking references measuring far lower. With English as her second language, she used a lot of repetitive emotional words to describe her silencing experience.

Both of these women represent a nuance that is important to tease out. Many speak and lead from a cognitive, head first, clavicle-up approach. They need coaching at times to drop into the

heart space and discover another way of knowing. Others lead from the heart space and have to be reminded to seek logic amid all the emotion. I fall into this latter category.

As an executive coach, I always pay attention to the orientation of my clients. It helps me assess their growth edge. For instance, I may simply ask, “So, what do you think about that?”

I often hear a response like, “Well, I just feel that. . . .”

I then will say, “You are expressing how you feel. But what are you thinking?”

Sometimes this will stump some of my clients. They will pause to find new words. They tangle up thinking and feeling as only one way of knowing when they are separate.

For the clients who lead from a cerebral space first, I often ask them to describe their emotions. Sometimes the emotional vocabulary is narrowed down to frustrated, stressed, overwhelmed, and busy. I have outlawed these four words with many clients because, let’s be honest—everyone is stressed, overwhelmed, busy, and frustrated. I do not think anyone cares about these words because they are used to describe everything.

Traffic, being on hold, weather, emails, phone calls, solicitors, our boss’s lack of Sanctifying Seven, the kid’s messy room, politics, having to make dinner, meetings running long, unwanted life changes, relationships, bills—everything causes frustration.

We use the word “overwhelm” when we talk about our schedules, projects, and responsibilities. Overwhelm means to bury, to drown beneath a huge mass—complete defeat. It is like a ship overwhelmed by the waves in the ocean. In this scenario, everyone dies.

My friends, we are not overwhelmed. We are not in complete defeat. Instead, we are whelmed. We are covered or experiencing something abundant. What a blessing to have a job with significance and a schedule to suggest that what we do is important. Family, life, and work responsibilities are not killing us—they are whelming us, and this distinction is critical as the shift in expression creates a new mind-set.

So, yes, we may all be busy, and that can lead to some physical or psychological stress, but we need to stop using the same four emotional words to describe every aspect of our lives. Anything overused or overplayed becomes a distraction to others and is ineffective.

What helps leaders to be even more effective with their Sanctifying Seven speech acts is to ensure they also have a deep and wide emotional vocabulary. Perhaps instead of overwhelmed, the keyword is challenged. Instead of frustrated, maybe the real emotional word is embarrassed about not knowing what to do. Behind the word stressed is maybe a level of betrayal over something a peer said or did. Perhaps it is not busy, but weary, suggesting a break is needed to restore some precious energy.

Different emotional words produce different insight, and when leaders fluctuate with their word choice, regardless of their speech act, they will get better results. There are hundreds of emotional words in the English vocabulary. You can Google a list and keep it close by as a tool. The reality is, we need to choose words that open up conversation and inquiry versus shutting it down. Frustration, stress, overwhelm, and busy are often conversation closers.

Just as there is a distinction between the head and heart, there is a third way of knowing—the gut.

The brain has 100 billion neurons, which we often call brain cells. The heart has about 40,000 neurons, and it can sense, feel, learn, and remember; it is your heart brain. The gut has 100 million neurons in the intestines; it is often referred to as the gut brain.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes when working with a client, and I also use this approach with my research participants, I will ask about their thoughts, then their emotions; last, I will ask what the gut is saying? Sometimes the head, heart, and gut say different things, and in other instances, the gut may be agreeing with another domain. Our hearts and brains have a dynamic relationship and can inform the other—they can also disagree. Often the gut is the deal-breaker when wrestling with decisions or a course of action.

I believe there is a space for the head, heart, and gut in every single sanctifying speech act.

My head can certainly be involved when I have an exchange of views with another by reminding me there are multiple ways to perceive a situation, and my views might not be driving the only perspective. My head can help me ask if there is another way of seeing something.

My emotion can certainly inform the way I choose directive language. If I need to give a directive, how do I ensure I am addressing what might be an emotional response from my listeners? My heart can make my language more palatable to those who need to hear.

Last, I can have a gut check when I am in a representative conversation with another. What is the story behind the factual data? My gut can also be a tie breaker when I am feeling indecisive about a decision that needs to be declared.

There are multiple examples of how the head, heart, and gut can work in tandem with each of the speech choices. The three domains also invite in a level of inquiry that can deepen the exchange in every sanctifying act. Inquiry is not just about asking a question to gain more knowledge; it is also about creating awareness at more profound levels for both parties. For instance, consider these questions based on each category:

- Representative—What am I missing? What is the story behind the data?
- Commissive—What will it take for you to trust my promise? What are you hearing is my actual commitment?
- Directive—What resistance are you experiencing? What needs to change for you to make this happen?
- Requests—What is your willingness to honor my request? What would you like to negotiate?
- Declarations—What will change for us now? What will make this sustainable?
- Views—What is another perspective? What is the head, heart, or gut saying?



- Apologies—What else do I need to hear from you? What is your level of acceptance?

Inquiry is a powerful leadership tool, and like anything, it can also be overused. Peter Senge has a great model that shows the balance between advocacy and inquiry. When leaders only use questions, they can come off as interrogators or be seen as withholding their own opinions. This can create the silence that confuses.<sup>3</sup>

On the flip side, when leaders only advocate (use speech acts without questions), they can be seen as dictators without thought for others. For inquiry to work, the leader has to have a genuine curiosity. Do not ask questions if you are not interested in the answers. Do not ask questions if you already have answers. (People hate that!) My advice to leaders is to try asking questions that begin with the word “what.” *What* is an opener and you are more likely to avoid closed-ended questions. *What* also creates a less defensive approach, whereas *why* can sometimes put people in an edgy space.

There is a lot to pay attention to when it comes to language. There are a lot of ways to lead poorly just as there are a lot of ways to use speech ineffectively. However, there are just as many ways to use language and lead well. To avoid silencing, or to emerge from a silencing experience, I recommend that women pay close attention to the following:

- What is your intention and impact when using voice?
- How are you using the “Sanctifying Seven” (RV-CARD<sup>2</sup>)?
- Are you leveraging the head, heart, and gut in each of the speech acts?
- What is your general use of inquiry?



Nancy was one of those research participants that I could have listened to for hours versus our allotted ninety minutes. Her ability to share her experience with a detailed account was married to a

capacity to reflect as she spoke. She had a careful balance between her views and representatives. I could also sense healing in her voice as she shared her experience. Someone was listening; someone was asking the right questions, and someone was honoring that feeling silenced was not a shameful event that could not be expressed.

One of the last questions in my protocol was to ask, “How does your body feel as you’ve answered these questions about voice and silence?”

At first, Nancy responded by saying,

Contracted and awful. It’s good in some ways to get it out. I am grateful for you. There’s part of me that wants to pass you a hazmat suit. I don’t know how you do it, hearing all these stories, it feels icky, like I can literally still feel all the same things somatically. I can feel how much I was trembling down the whole core median through to my gut. I can feel how angry I was. I can feel the combination of the rage and the numbness and trembling.

At the beginning of this chapter, I wrote that Nancy talked about her voice feeling choppy. As we become more aware of something, we begin to shift our behavior, choices, and language. In time the choppiness starts to smooth out as we realize we are gaining distinctions in how to use speech with intention and purpose; and as Nancy says, “I think bringing this stuff to light is what starts to open the door for people to be a little more awake to the impact that they have on each other as well as for the ways that people who feel they have been silenced can advocate for themselves and get out of the ‘stuckness’ and the pain of it sooner.”

## 8

# DOMINANT DISCOURSE

## A Voice with Currency

*I noticed my speech patterns changed. I stutter more than I ever did before; I'm more hesitant, and it is more difficult for me to speak. I have a lot of anxiety and nervousness when I speak, especially if I am stating an opinion or an idea.*

—Author and Director at a Managed Care Organization

Amanda, typically one of the youngest leaders in her organization, is a witty storyteller with colorful language. She experienced a great deal of success in her early career working for a male leader who saw her potential and leveraged her abilities. She is energetic, willing to learn, and eager to grow. It was normal for her to go home after work and read a manual on databases or clinical programs to better understand the systems she worked within. She could devour up to 100 pages on any given night, and she quickly advanced in her career. She dared to challenge the status quo and was paving the way for other women to follow.

In her interview, I heard examples of directives, representatives, and gut-level requests in her interactions. “I would look for things that needed to be done, that no one had gotten to yet, and I would come up with a solution for how I was going to take care of

it. That was my approach.” It worked! She was given a great deal of responsibility, and her innovative leadership was valued. Then the organization shifted in structure. She found herself working with other types of executives who did not always favor her style or feel the same desire to leverage her abilities in the organization.

This particular female director faced something that many leaders experience. What was once heard and appreciated is no longer welcomed in the same organization with a new audience. Amanda later left her organization, and they lost a valuable asset.

When female leaders have advocates or champions at higher levels, they thrive! It is a profound sense of freedom to know you have support to try, fail, learn, or practice. Not every leader gets this opportunity. There are rarely dry runs before women take the reins to lead. There are no practice sessions or long runways. In most cases, women have to hit the ground running with little resources or support.

The *PBS NewsHour* program released an article in 2015 about why women are placed in charge of failing companies. One of their taglines read, *when we think crisis—we think female*. It was not suggesting women were behind the crisis. It was quite the opposite. It referenced how failing companies are often led to a downward spiral by privileged white men. Once in a place of crisis, the board will often reach out to anyone who is not a white man. Voilà, a woman is hired!<sup>1</sup>

However, these organizations can be in such dire straits that she is unable to recover the situation, and the failure is then associated with her as the CEO. Thus, the glass cliff metaphor is born. Their research further highlights that when organizations are stable—more men are hired. When situations are challenging—women and leaders of color are brought in as stabilizers. The leadership opportunities are not always equal, and the common beliefs within the organization differ based on the health of the company.

My research participant, Amanda, was a utility leader. She was able to identify gaps and areas of potential crisis. She came up with solutions in a proactive manner and did not hesitate to go

straight to the CEO with her ideas. One could argue that as the organization shifted, perhaps it got more structured, organized, or stable, her “think crisis—think me” leadership no longer was needed. She was relegated back to someone’s perspective of her “place.” She felt silenced and literally lost her ability to vocalize some of her ideas. She found herself not just shaken by the shift in the organization; her voice became rattled by a stutter.

The last chapter highlighted all the crucial distinctions in voice. There is a performing act *of* words, *in* words, and *by* words. There are seven sanctifying speech acts that require a level of head, heart, and gut. There is also a needed skill with inquiry that creates an invitation of deep awareness. Sometimes all those things can be present, and a woman can still experience silencing.

Women cannot be effective with voice in a vacuum; they must determine what effectiveness looks like within their work context. They need to understand the dominant discourse. Who and how are people heard?

## DOMINANT DISCOURSE

Discourse contains ideological beliefs, and dominance is created by those in power. Dominant discourse is often the unspoken way things are done or addressed within an organization. It is a way of seeing or speaking about topics that is fundamentally accepted because it is so shared or repeated.

I grew up in healthcare. There was a dominant discourse within my last hospital that centered around accord. We, as a collective group of leaders, were a peace-loving group. On the Clifton Strengths assessment, the majority of top five strengths of 100+ leaders included harmony or relating.<sup>2</sup> In fact, I remember at the time, there was only one leader who had the strength of command in her top five. Perhaps certain industries do not attract leaders with a commanding strength, or maybe we had a dominant discourse that did not seem inviting to those who leveraged a lot of directives.

I love harmony! Who does not? And yet, any strength, when overplayed, becomes a weakness. At times, I remember the dominant discourse within the hospital to be soft on issues and slow to react to problems. We had no problem voicing our concerns in the privacy of our offices with our trusted colleagues, but in the larger meetings, we were measured in what we would say or bring up. I do not think the dominant discourse of my hospital silenced leaders in general, it just took a while before things were urgent enough to address.

My example is one that many are familiar with. If a female leader gets hired and wants to leverage a lot of directives, expressive questions, and speak at a cadence that is faster than the slow pace of the majority, she may begin to feel out of sync with the dominant discourse.

I have another client who is also in a healthcare organization. The female CEO has an extroverted personality and likes a lot of fast-paced banter in her meetings. She enjoys the tension of hard conversations because she believes it makes them focused and healthier. She likes it when every voice in the room is heard, and she also wants to see a sense of urgency in her leadership team. A laid back, unhurried approach is not acceptable to her. When she sees a leader who prefers to observe, is slow to speak, or shows any level of passivity, she sees that as a deviation of the culture. The discourse in this organization is loud, vibrant, fast, and edgy.

In this second example, leadership in this organization may need to let go of their preference for introversion, risk-avoidance, or peacekeeping to feel included or perceived as successful.

Neither organization is necessarily right or wrong—there are advantages and disadvantages embedded in each of the dominant discourses. For women to feel successful in their roles as leaders, they need to have a good understanding of the culture, systems, and protocols that are real but tacit. They need to develop an organizational fluency, and the questions in Figure 8.1 might be a good fluency assessment.

There are dozens of other questions that can create a sense of awareness of the dominant discourse inside a particular organiza-

## FLUENCY ASSESSMENT

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>☞ WHAT IS SPOKEN?</p> <p>☞ WHAT IS THE CADENCE OF SPEECH?</p> <p>☞ WHAT METAPHORS ARE COMMONLY USED?</p> <p>☞ HOW IS CONFLICT MANAGED?</p> <p>☞ HOW IS CRISIS HANDLED?</p> <p>☞ HOW IS FAILURE TOLERATED?</p> <p>☞ WHAT IS THE WILLINGNESS TO FOLLOW?</p> <p>☞ HOW OPEN IS THE ORGANIZATION TO HEARING THE HEAD, HEART, OR GUT?</p> | <p>☞ WHAT IS NOT NAMED?</p> <p>☞ HOW LOUD DO PEOPLE GET?</p> <p>☞ WHO GETS THE MOST AIRTIME?</p> <p>☞ WHAT IS THE TYPICAL PACE?</p> <p>☞ WHAT IS EFFECTIVE?</p> <p>☞ HOW IS RISK PERCEIVED?</p> <p>☞ HOW IS INQUIRY LEVERAGED?</p> <p>☞ WHAT IS THE WILLINGNESS TO LEAD?</p> <p>☞ HOW ARE THE SANCTIFYING SEVEN SPEECH ACTS USED?</p> <p>☞ WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?</p> |
|--|--|

**Figure 8.1. Fluency Assessment**

tion. Yes, leaders have the power to influence change and create new norms, reset standards, and declare change. Yes, sometimes organizations purposefully hire women to lead with a different voice and do not want them to assimilate into an unhealthy culture. And leaders still need to understand what the current state of discourse is before they can effectively influence change. The need for fluency will always be critical.

I also believe it is a mistake to keep telling women to be their authentic natural self, and that they will be fine regardless of the culture. I have seen way too many examples that prove this untrue. There is authentic leadership, and there is authenticity—two different things; one is good advice, and the other is often not.

## AUTHENTICITY

When we suggest to women that they try to be more authentic, we are lending advice that may have a lot of holes, especially if they think authenticity is about leading from preferences. If I decided to lead from a place of preference, you would hear me swear a lot, all meetings would be twenty minutes or less, I would cut off anyone who starts a long story, I would cut off anyone who says, “to make a long story short” (because we all know that’s going to turn into a lie); I would, however, allow long discussions about reality television, I might place a sign that says do not talk to me before 8:15 am, at leadership retreats we would have time to read on our own, I would outlaw any games or icebreakers because I think they are awkward, and I would limit team projects because I prefer to work on my own. I just listed a few items in my version of utopia! If I am real—these are some of the things I prefer. Many assume that authenticity is about anchoring to preference.

The fundamental belief about authenticity is that a person is not wearing a mask or becoming a different personality when they lead. They do not imitate or act in disingenuous ways. At a surface level, this seems like great advice—leaders need to be real.

Elizabeth Holmes, the founder of Theranos, made headlines when her company purported to have breakthrough technology in blood testing but closed their doors in 2018 amid several counts of fraud. Many believe that Holmes allegedly faked her voice to make it sound lower. If you watch a YouTube video of her speaking, it will be painfully obvious. She also preferred to dress in a black turtleneck with black pants—there was a weird Steve Jobs



phenomenon happening. People came forward to accuse her of creating a persona, or an imitation; she created a role for herself.<sup>3</sup>

This is an extreme example of the opposite of authenticity.

I was a guest on the (in)Visible Women podcast led by two amazing African American women. I had the opportunity to speak about voice and silencing, and in preparation for my episode, I listened to some of the other recorded guests. One was about attire and the way African American women dress and groom themselves. The hosts described how black women are often given professional advice to assimilate when it comes to their hairstyles. This is something that, as a privileged white woman, I have never had to contend with. For an African American female leader, a natural hairstyle might be a small but proud version of her true self.<sup>4</sup>

This is just a small example, and there are many more. When I am authentic, I stop assimilating and be me. However, there is a difference between authenticity and preferences.

One of my silenced research participants described her struggles with authenticity this way,

I created an identity for myself around my capabilities and my competency. I bought into, "Work hard, play hard." I bought into, "Sure, I'll work the 50, 60-hour weeks." I bought into, "The leader eats less." I grabbed all of those things that made sense to me at the time and built this identity for how I wanted to show up.

She later described questioning that identity when the rewards were missing, and her work was dismissed. She, like so many in my research, described the sensation of not knowing what was true of herself during a silencing experience. "Am I really this person? Or is this who I have become to get by?" In the journey to know ourselves, we often have to untangle our preferences, which can change over time, from our authenticity, which may be rooted and much more deep-seated. Family of origin, culture, gender, religious beliefs, and a variety of other factors help to create an authen-

tic self. Many of my research participants found it unsettling to reach places in their career where they began to question everything.

It is also important to note—leadership is not a call for preferential comfort; it is a call for courage.

The journey to discover self can take us into some dark and cold places. It can also shed restorative light on who we are meant to be. Language may be part of it, but our words alone do not make us authentic. I prefer to unhook authenticity and language. When we ask women to be purposeful and effective with their speech acts, by no means are we suggesting they speak in ways that are routinely inauthentic. As leaders, we must employ all levels of language, cadence, and style when we speak, even if it is not the preferred natural way. Sometimes voice needs to pivot to be heard. When women understand what is authentic in themselves, there is a more natural ability to pivot into places that are awkward and then pivot back. This ability to know the self is significant if they are going to be authentic leaders, which is different than mere authenticity.

## **AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP**

Every leadership theory emerges based on societal conditions or context, and authentic leadership is no different.

Between the mid 1980s and 2000s, the employee voice became more prominent in research. It was primarily in response to corporate and government scandals that shook public confidence in the role of leadership. The WhistleBlower Protection Act passed in 1989, and this became an era that focused on what it takes to report wrongdoing and what is involved in establishing organizational justice. Ethical leadership and regulation were required, and the scholarly community responded with empirical studies on speaking up, organizational climate, and the nature of perceived wrongdoing. By 2007, the majority of organizations had some type

of policy in place encouraging employees to report if they become aware of unethical behavior.<sup>5</sup>

After 9/11, society's need for leadership shifted away from the mere anti-scandal candidate. Now, there was a new cry from the heart. Followers were seeking something more than a rule-abiding ethical leader; they also wanted someone they could trust who would respect some of the deeper fears many Americans held and still hold. Are you a good man? Are you a good woman? This was the space that allowed the idea of authentic leadership to emerge.

Many assume authentic leadership is about being genuine and showing your authentic self. Seems simple, right? By now, you my readers should know what I am about to say—it is more complicated. There is no single, accepted definition of authentic leadership. As one of over sixty-five leadership theories or constructs, the first article on this topic emerged in 2003. There have been many attempts to define and explain what this looks like in a conceptual form with social scientists emphasizing different elements.<sup>6</sup>

I have heard authentic leadership described by some as the full-transparency approach; leaders share their thinking and feeling with others versus taking on a leadership persona that may not be true for them. Let's be real for a second. If we all took the full-transparency approach, many of us would be in jail, and the rest would have multiple restraining orders filed against us. If everyone said everything that was truly going on inside, there would be so many f-bombs, snarky remarks, murder threats, screams, cries, sarcasm, and trash talk it would be *badbadbadbad*.

At one point in my healthcare career, transparency was introduced as a leadership competency and was presented as a positive trait we should try to adopt. We did not stay positive—as leaders, we went dark. We weaponized it and created nightmares. Today, if I hear someone say, “to be transparent,” or, “can I just be transparent for a second,” and my favorite, “well, in the spirit of transparency,” my skin crawls. I will psychologically buckle up because I know I am about to hear a mouthful of views. Transparency became a four-letter word in our organization's culture.

If you preface what you are about to say with a “transparency” public service announcement, you are probably doing it wrong and may not understand authentic leadership.

Yes, there is a relational transparency aspect to authentic leadership. However, relational transparency occurs in a relationship. It is not a platform for a leader to unhinge and share all their core thinking and feeling; nor is transparency a license to share without the filter God gave you.

I will skip all the nuances that scholars have researched or debated and instead, summarize my understanding of what the authentic leadership theory surmises. Authentic leaders:

1. Behave in ways that draw upon their inner *positive* psychological mind-set that include factors of confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience
2. Promote this same positive psychological capacity in their followers
3. Create a positive ethical climate
4. Foster self-awareness (which takes time to develop)
5. Rely on their internal moral compass, which helps them focus on the balance between leading from a task perspective while also being in relationship with others
6. Impact followers in ways that inspire them also to foster positive self-development

Authentic leadership at its core could feed the hungry. We have so many examples of leaders who have failures both in their public and private lives that leave many of us living in a void wondering, where is our Moses? If we want to encourage our female leaders to be authentic, let’s be sure to do it with full knowledge of what this suggestion means. It is also not a quick model or a two-day training with some skill adoption. I think this is a decade-long, or more extended approach to leading that requires a lot of self-development and emotional intelligence.

To share my core feelings, motives, and inclinations with others in a positive way—I have first to discover them. I work with a lot

of leaders who have just begun some of this inner work to find those internal anchors that drive their passion and purpose. Positivity is an essential aspect of authentic leadership. It is not about saying everything you feel or think. It is also not about leading from a place of preferential style.

## THE PREFERENCE PIVOT

It takes courage to let go of our preferences and lead in spaces that challenge our comfort and tolerance levels. And I have seen far too many women try the authentic (but in reality, preferential) approach and have their language choices turn into blurts. They get overly expressive, and sometimes they show anger in ways that damage relationships. I have watched women get fired for being unwilling to shift their communication away from so much context to a bullet-point approach. They remain unconvinced that their listener will receive the wholeness of their message if they do not provide as many details as possible. This is rarely true, but they remain attached to that preference.

I have seen leaders get fired for being quiet. That Pinterest post that says that *no one gets fired for listening too much* seems witty and clever, but is false. Sometimes leaders need to stop listening and contribute their ideas because when they do not, they are seen as ineffective and not moving work forward in direct or strategic ways. They are not articulating their vision and purpose for the areas they lead and rarely is an organization able to tolerate that for too long. Their preference for bystanding is getting in the way of success.

I was a keynote speaker at a conference for female lawyers in California and was discussing the concept that authenticity may not always be the best approach. Sometimes we have to determine the dominant discourse in an organization and then figure out how to align with that style to be successful. I introduced the concept of the pivot.

One woman took offense to what I said and suggested that by trying to align with the dominant discourse, I am encouraging women to use a man's approach, which exacerbates the problem. I had to pause before I responded to deconstruct her concern. Male dominance is certainly prevalent but not every dominant discourse is unhealthy. We may have to unhitch dominant discourse from male dominance; it is not always the default. Dominant discourse can also be female dominant, or in many cases, it is androgynous.

Our male colleagues can contribute to cultures that are appropriate and strong, but not necessarily aligned with a female's preference. We also cannot assume that all women want the same thing, and that all men want something different. This is fundamentally untrue. The example I gave of my hospital having a dominant discourse of harmony was not born because of a bunch of white guys. It was just something that emerged over time as a preferred style by both genders.

There is also a growing body of research that suggests leadership, which was historically linked to masculinity (because for centuries men were the only ones leading) has shifted into androgyny. Both male and female characteristics are embodied in leadership. The balance between task and relationship is so significant in how leaders are measured today that pure masculinity is rarely valued as much as the balance that the feminine brings. I have also seen a lot of men lean more toward what might be perceived as feminine in their leadership, and women lean toward the masculine. I am not talking about characteristics or dress; I am referencing their preference in how they lead. Things are no longer so black or white, male or female, good or bad. Just as leadership is now being discussed as androgynous, I think dominant discourse is close behind.<sup>7</sup>

Now to be fair, the woman who raised her concern at the conference works at a law firm where less than 20 percent of the partners are women. So, in her situation, dominant discourse and male dominance are probably joined at the hip. There also could be other preferential factors that might surface if one were to use the fluency questions I suggested earlier. Organizational fluency

will create awareness if a female leader can fit inside the organization in a way that does not require them to lead outside their preference zone the majority of the time.

If I am naturally left-handed working in a right-handed culture, I can sloppily get by, but my body might hate it even if it starts to assimilate.

## A VOICE WITH CURRENCY

I met my best friend Heather in college, and one of my favorite Heather quotes was when she was complaining about her work and wailed, “I just want to get paid to be me!” Amen and me too! In the words of Brené Brown, “No one belongs here more than you,” but I would like to add, “and here is a check for a lot of money!”

We may chuckle at the concept, but we should not lose sight of how our voices can carry different kinds of currency. Currency is about a system of exchange. The voice is a powerful gift that everyone, regardless of their role, can leverage. With practice and feedback, each of us can grow in our distinctions of silence and the use of sanctifying speech acts. We can also coach ourselves to pause and reflect on what messages are coming from the head, heart, and gut. With careful observation and inquiry, we can discern the dominant discourse of our organization to determine what we would like to influence, avoid, shift, or align with in ways that make sense.

At the same conference from my previous example, I had another female attorney who is a litigator give an example of how she has found success in the courtroom. All her examples involved voice. She described how she slows down her cadence. She does not talk in a fast, clipped way like she might if she was in a more relaxed preferred environment. Instead, she slows her speech because (a) she has learned that judges react better when it is slower versus rapid-fire, (b) she wants that court reporter to capture everything she says, and (c) when she decides to object and inter-

rupt that prosecuting attorney, she wants the elevation in her voice to be seen as different versus more of the same.

She also described how she never lets herself be interrupted by the other side and will purposely get directive and say, “Do not interrupt me.” If she allows it once, they may see her as someone who will continue to allow it. Over time, she has honed her voice in that setting to be as effective and purposeful as possible. She is a damn smart attorney, and she has a track record to prove it. But is this her natural preference and style of speaking? Maybe not, but she has learned to pivot in that courtroom, and she pivots back when she leaves that setting. The pivot has not pushed her to a place of inauthenticity, nor does it create a false persona. She knows who she is; she knows her intentions, and she knows how to show up with a voice that works. She uses all the options available to her and has established a voice with currency.

Women with this type of currency are many things. They are respected, followed, sought after, inspirational, but most of all—they are heard! Every female leader needs to keep assessing what is impacting their currency as they lead.

When I was in the middle of my research, it became clear that a silencing experience did not have a clear beginning, middle, or end. These life and leadership issues are often knotted. However, an essential structure to my study was that my participants could recall past experiences, discuss what happened, how it happened, and how they moved beyond that experience. As with many things, the pain of individual experiences can resurface in unexpected ways. It is also possible that silencing can feel circular. A woman may feel that she has moved to voice currency only to find herself in a similar silencing situation that triggers previous pain or reaction.

The literature on mental health suggests that there is a continuum we move along in regards to mental health. Like a pendulum, we can swing in directions, and our trajectory is not always linear or step by step. The range of well-being is a journey between languishing and flourishing. To languish is a dismal sense of being that is burdened by a lot of despair, stagnation, or emptiness. To



flourish is everything! The word itself suggests life, growth, happiness—sunshine, and joy. We all want to feel this sense of well-being.<sup>8</sup>

Although I want to disconnect the concept of voice with authenticity, so we do not confuse it with our preferences, it is essential to note that authenticity is a space that allows a voice to flourish. To then take that authenticity, we have worked hard to discover and channel it into authentic leadership is indeed a victorious adult development triathlon. A voice with currency is a voice that flourishes, and this is a powerful platform for female leaders that the world is aching to experience. The platform is not a complete safety zone; setbacks or challenges will nick, bruise, and scratch. I have also heard that the higher you go on the flag pole, the more your ass will show. Effective leadership will stress and challenge the best of anyone, and despite there never being complete safety in this role, the goal is to keep ourselves from slipping into dark spaces where the silencing virus can incubate or spread.

I will end this chapter with an introduction of what comes next—a typology of women that I found in my research. There are women who found their flourish within their organizations and those who had to opt out to begin the rediscovery process. There are also two other categories of women that help inform what it means to lead with voice currency.



I often think of Amanda and the future she has in front of her. Shortly after our interview, she emailed me to give me an update of what was happening in her life and the status of her situation. Her silencing experience had not shifted into voice recovery yet. She did say, “Thank you so much for the opportunity to participate. It was really cathartic to be able to tell someone about my experiences and feel heard.”

Healing begins when someone listens and yet, recovery can be just as complicated as silencing.



## THE JOURNEY TO VOICE RECOVERY

### Who or What Is Coming Along?

*What started happening is that he would point and ask me to talk more in meetings. He saw the dynamics, so he would prod. He would specifically say, “Cindy, what are your thoughts on that? Do you agree?” Like, after the [other] person would talk and give his view of whatever the project was, he would specifically say, “Cindy, is that your sentiment as well?” It was intentional, and I admire him a lot because he is a white male, but he amplified me in meetings.*

—Financial Services Executive

**C**indy is a highly paid HR executive working for a financial services organization. She sits at the intersection of being black, female, and holding an executive HR role within an industry that primarily employs white men. “My gender is so secondary. For me, my first thing is my race.”

It is common for me to hear women describe the double bind. Race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and various other factors are part of our DNA. There is no single-issue problem because, as women, we do not live single-issue lives.

In my research, I chose to focus on three specific factors. Number one is to be a *leader*, which is a position of privilege regardless of any other characteristics. Second, I wanted to understand the phenomenon of what it means to be silenced, which is a marginalizing phenomenon irrespective of your level in an organization. Last, to be *female*—a gender that has been deemed throughout history as the weaker sex. I wanted to understand what it was like to be a silenced female leader.

Race, religion, culture, first language, marriage, children, sex, age, size, and other characteristics or preferences all surfaced in natural ways as I heard the stories of the women in my research. For the most part, my participants saw themselves as female first, leader second. However, in other cases, my participants named being black first, female second, and leader last. Others might say, “I’m just me,” and not associate with any identifier. Most of us claim multiple intersections, and not all those crossings carry equal weight. Some might be major highways; others have light signals and warning signs, while others are mere bike trails. To determine the importance of each intersection, we have to ask one crucial question, “What is the first thing I think about when I wake up in the morning?”

I know upon waking that we all think about schedules. Calendar appointments, the weather, expectations, and what is on the day’s agenda are always top of mind; we go to our lists in conscious and unconscious ways. The tactical things are a given; but do you also wake up thinking about one of your intersections?

I’ll be honest, on a typical morning, I wake up thinking about the gender of this body that God gave me. I wonder about how my over-forty curves will fit in my clothes, that wretched spot of thinning hair, or how much attention the bags under my eyes will need in regard to cover up. I may ruminate over the amount of food I ate the night before and how my system will respond today. Because of my previous health issues, I always assess my breathing, and if it hurts or if it flows. I am also scanning for what is happening with the female parts—our lady doctors lecture us consistently

to do so. It is a lot to pay attention to, before we have even crawled out of bed.

Second, I tend to shift my thinking away from my femaleness to my role as a mom with a daughter. I think of her, her femaleness, and what issues she is currently facing as a young woman. Gender and parenting are always top of mind and are primary before I think of any other intersection.

However, for my friends, colleagues, and research participants who are black, their morning reflection may look vastly different. They may lay in bed processing their blackness first before they ever arrive at their femaleness. They may move from their blackness to the parenting of their children's blackness before gender even shows up on the list. For those with black husbands or sons, they have shared with me that they think of drive times, traffic offenses, and lectures about how to act with law enforcement. These issues are always top of the brain for some and for many, something they will never have to contend.

For those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer—I believe they would argue that their waking thoughts show another pattern entirely. If you are not a member of the LGBT+ community, it is hard to relate to their struggles of inclusion, significance, bias, and discrimination. Gender may be top of mind for them, but in a dissimilar way; their intersections are different.

I honor all these perspectives. I also admit, I only have my experience as a white female because that is how I was born. My genealogy shows I descend from parts of Ireland and Eastern Europe. My great grandpa on my father's side, Blazius Starovasnik, was born on February 2, 1881. In 1915, he came to America alone through Philadelphia and worked as an interpreter. His last name was too hard to pronounce and was changed by immigration officials to Strovas. He was Jewish, and his wife, Maria, was Catholic. She later followed him to America along with five of their children. None of them, except for Blaz, could speak a lick of English. My great-grandparents settled in Walsenburg, Colorado, built a general store that served the people who worked at three

local coal mines and eventually had seven more children. My Grandpa Joseph was the youngest.

I do not have a lineage that is royal or rich; nor do I have one that is rooted in slavery or oppression. My great grandparents may have been shunned for their interfaith marriage, but they had the agency to leave, come to America, and start over. Despite how hard my ancestors worked to establish a life here and how they journeyed out of poverty, my whiteness extends me privilege. My story is one of many, but it is also unique to me.

We must also believe our non-white sister colleagues when they say their situations are unique. People may seem similar, and experiences can be generalized or called typical, but we must always see the differences. The only way we can truly appreciate someone is to know them in their individual contexts and intersections. From a research standpoint, this means I have an idiopathic perspective; I see everyone as exclusive, unique, special, separate, and exceptional.

I cannot speak for all women. Nor can I speak for all women who are silenced. We cannot expect anyone who belongs to certain categories to carry universal messages that generalize the human experience.

It is with this vital acknowledgment that I moved into what I also discovered was a nomothetic perspective, which is the idea that there are qualities or properties that may hold true for groups.

Although my great-grandpa Blaz had his own unique challenges of being a poor Jewish immigrant married to a Catholic woman with a large family, he still had much in common with others. He belonged to the “forbidden love” type, the “poor immigrant” type, “separated from his family” type, and thrust into a “new-world-go-west-young-man” type.

## **A TYPOLOGY**

The word “typology” tends to rile up defenses. Few like to be labeled or categorized into a group. People may bristle when you

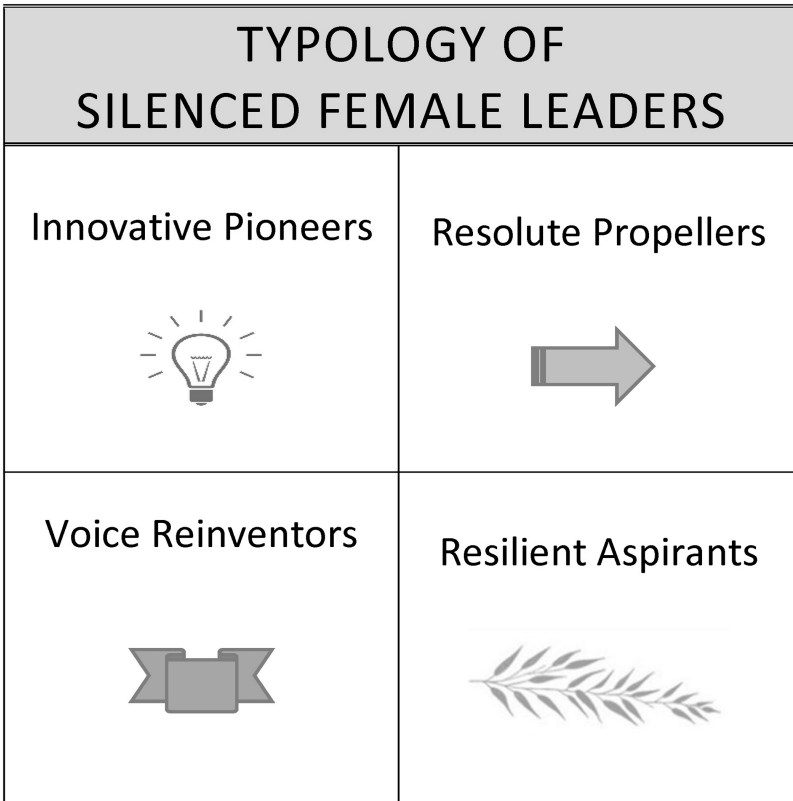
ask them their Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) code or what letter they are in the DiSC. These are two different assessments that measure preferences and personality traits. I had an awesome client complain that he was probably the last person on the planet that did not know his MBTI letters. He said he took another assessment and came out an Antelope. He planned to stick with that! I got him to take the MBTI, and when he got his results, he turned out to be an ENTP.<sup>4</sup> For other Antelopes out there—you might be an extraverted, intuitive, thinker, who prefers to keep their options open (*just sayin'*).

If I am typing someone, how can I possibly know them in their individual context? The truth is, I cannot. *And* there is also something cathartic, healing, or humanizing to be told you are not the only one. Sometimes we need to know our type or category because it helps normalize what often feels isolating.

In chapter 6, I introduced a tool called the Silencing the Self Scale—Work (STSS-W), which I used to help supplement my research interviews. Nomothetic themes tend to surface in quantitative data, and this was true in my case. Women who stayed in a position after feeling silenced versus leaving their leadership role showed some differences. I also saw some differences and similarities between women who considered themselves recovered from their silencing experience versus those who were still in it. When I saw these characteristics creating categories, I also paid attention to their STSS-W scores to see if they shifted based on the four groups. In many cases, they did. Four specific types emerged (see figure 9.1).

## INNOVATIVE PIONEERS

Innovative Pioneers are female leaders who recovered from their silencing experience without opting out of their leadership role. To emphasize, these are women who took a position, endured silencing in that role, and then recovered while leading in that same position. To stay after a silencing experience is not only rare,



**Figure 9.1. Typology of Silenced Female Leaders**

it is an act of courage. There were two factors I saw true in this type.

First, one of the reasons these women were able to stay is they found sponsors within their organization who were not their silencers. Sponsorship is a squishy concept that many executives have not mastered and they struggle with the distinctions between sponsoring and managing. The role emerged recently within the project management context and is often part of change management strategies. In theory, changes do not “stick” in organizations if there are not executive sponsors supporting and resourcing what



is needed. Projects may be specific, like needing a technology conversation; projects can also be conceptual like ensuring another leader has growth opportunities and the ability to advance.

Research participants in this category expressed that healing came when someone else allowed them to shine. In rare cases, I heard women say another female executive created that space to innovate. For most, the participants in this group said they began to heal when an executive man gave them room to pioneer. This is an important thing for my male readers to note—you have the opportunity to help women heal from silencing when you give them new projects that showcase their talents. Give them new opportunities and then get out of their way so they can return to their amazing, brilliant leadership self!

I interviewed two women with long military backgrounds who both described male colleagues as their greatest advocates and instrumental in their healing from the silencing virus. These men were other leaders in the military and not necessarily direct line supervisors. They were allies who helped them politically navigate. The men not only knew what these women were capable of, they also knew how these female leaders could position themselves to be heard.

The second factor that was true for this category was the opportunity to innovate. Innovation is a significant factor in the healing process for those who stay in the same leadership position they experienced silencing in. I had several participants describe how taking on a new project, new team, or being assigned a facilitating role in the organization helped create a new mind-set of opportunity and voice. They had a chance to repurpose their leadership without leaving.

Two of my participants described how their male CEOs gave them new lines of business and asked them to help turn them around. These women did the work without falling off the glass cliff. This new work not only put some distance between them and their silencers, but it also allowed them to be reminded of their capabilities. I do not think the men in these examples were entirely conscious of how much support they were extending. Women

do not need rescue—we are rarely damsels in distress. We do appreciate, though, men in leadership who stand beside us and show sponsorship in our leadership.

Most importantly, this category of women worked hard. They did not regain a voice with currency by happenstance. They worked diligently to build community and self-regard; they learned to balance feedback and not become subject to the perspective of their silencers. They were able to identify the systems that routinely silenced them and, when possible, shift or minimize those systems. Innovation and sponsorship are critical to recovery for women who fall into this type. They advocated for and created something that helped their voices emerge. This eventually led to healing and a sense of efficacy. Innovative Pioneers do not feel silenced anymore, and they spoke of their experience as being in the past. They did not speak from an open wound; they spoke from scars and could recall things from a different and evolved perspective. Only 23 percent of my participants fell into this category—suggesting less than a quarter of women who feel silenced can stay and recover.

In summary, Innovative Pioneers soldier within the walls of the organizations in which they experienced episodic or lengthy durations of silencing. The name, Innovative Pioneer, honors them for two reasons. First, they established and settled in their organizations despite the hardships. Second, they found ways to innovate their leadership roles so they could transition away from feeling silenced. In some cases, they did outlast their silencer; in other situations, they were able to strategically navigate with the help of sponsors and by repurposing their leadership in place.

## **RESOLUTE PROPELLERS**

Resolute Propellers are women who are still experiencing forms of silencing and have made the decision to stay in their current leadership role. This represents 21 percent of participants within my study. Often the sources of silencing in these situations are low-

level or remnants of a silencing encounter from which they have not fully healed. The STSS-W scores verified this by showing a slightly lower median and average. Women in this category do not speak of their silencing experience as something in the past; they use language to suggest they still struggle. Propelling forward is the key for these women as they work to manage and recover versus staying in isolation. These are women who feel an urge to stay and continue to lead, despite the obstacles and viral effects of silencing. Leaving is not yet the solution, but they consider it regularly. Many female leaders who fall into this type use language to suggest they have not been released from their calling yet; they need to stay and lead to a particular outcome. There is also this “wait and see” stance that things will improve if their silencer leaves, or a hope that the culture and systems will shift, allowing a chance for voice recovery.

What I noticed with this group is that I had more women of color here. Having options is a privilege, and making job changes may be easier for some than others. I know many women struggle with the notion that no one will hire them at the same level they are currently in because of age, credentials, or some other factor. Often the saboteur’s voice keeps them locked in place. Staying can be an act of courage, and leaving can be a monumental decision.

It is also important to note that black women do not always claim a voice of feminism, which is often something they see as inherently “White.” This goes back to my claim that gender may not be top of mind for black women; their race might be more prominent. When women of color feel silenced, they do not automatically attribute it to issues of gender. Having a voice as an African American woman in white culture is a different experience than a white woman. I saw that many non-white participants had determination in them. They did not want to be chased away; they were unshakeable. One African American participant sticks out for me in that she was clutching to this idea of resolution. She had been and was feeling silenced by another female executive. She had endured a history of patronizing and demoralizing behavior. Despite all the challenges of starting over in a new organization

and the uncertainty that brings, I sensed that she felt that if she left too soon, she would miss an opportunity for justice that she was hoping would come.

The title of this category shows a female resoluteness and a purpose to propel forward. The most important question for this type to reckon with is whether their resolution serves them in voice recovery. Can they move themselves to be Innovative Pioneers, or does their determination to stay come at too high a personal cost?

## **VOICE REINVENTORS**

Voice Reinventors, also 23 percent of the women I studied, are female leaders who have left an organization in part because of their silencing experiences. These women have returned to a leadership role (either formal or informal) and as a result of their leadership changes (and at times, break from employment) have found recovery from their silencing. They no longer speak of feeling silenced and see their departure as critical to their recovery. Women in this type have reinvented themselves in new settings. A thought-provoking discovery is that individuals who are voice reinventors are also equally passionate about speaking for and supporting social justice issues. Because of their experience with silencing, they see themselves as the voices for those who are often unable to speak up.

An executive in a nonprofit organization described how she had to go the legal route to create the type of healing she needed. Her silencer was not viewed as someone who would stop his viral effect on women. She chose to pursue litigation due to the extent of the damage. Winning a court case did not bring immediate healing. She spoke of how it took over a year before she could slow the cognitive spin and emotional pain. Once she began to reconnect with her nonprofit tribe of executives and mitigate the sense of isolation, her healing began. She then used her experience to fuel

her leadership. She spoke of how she is now hypersensitive to ensuring every voice at the table is heard.

Women in this category have a “never again” attitude. They can recall the pain of their experiences and at times, the shame for how long they tolerated silencing before making the necessary changes. The key for female leaders in this group is that they had the agency to reinvent. They did not buy the lies that leaving would end their leadership career, or that they would never find another role at the level of their capability. Many in this type left without having another job lined up and stayed unemployed for months. Not one of them—again, not one of them recalled any regret in their decision to leave. Instead, they described their learning and how they now approach their lives and leadership with a sense of identity and efficacy.

## **RESILIENT ASPIRANTS**

Resilient Aspirants are female leaders who have opted out of leadership or made job changes and are still in the recovery process from feeling silenced. Unfortunately, more women, 32 percent of those I studied, fell into this group. In some cases, they have chosen to step down from leadership entirely, and in other cases, they have made job changes and continue to lead despite still feeling silenced. These women are CEOs, executive vice presidents, senior directors, and other types of leaders with large scopes of responsibility. Women here are bringing their silenced essence into new positions, and the pain of not being their full and effective selves is a continuous challenge.

I mentioned earlier that I paid attention to the language choices my participants used. When I heard a female executive say things like, “I remember it well” or “That does not happen to me anymore,” I knew I was dealing with a participant whose pain was past-tense. They described their work environment in different terms and could give specific and positive examples when I asked them to describe their use of voice now.

Conversely, women in this category spoke of their pain in the present tense. In some cases, their examples of silencing repeated in the new organization and were a continuation of something that has been a pattern for them in more than one place. They talked about how they moved from one silencing environment to another, or how old silencers were replaced with new ones. In other cases, they recalled their silencing experience at another organization and how it continued to impact them in their new leadership role. They talked about feeling measured or needing to be careful so that the silencing would not be repeated. They were gripped with hypersensitivity versus a sense of peace and presence. Examples that they had moved fully beyond their virus were few to none. It was also not uncommon for me to hear women say that they saw their use of voice as a lifelong challenge and one they were not sure they would ever fully tackle.

These female leaders, who make up the majority of women I studied, aspire for the purposeful voices they know they are capable of, but they also recognize that their recovery takes time, and they need space to shed the viral effects of their silencing. In many cases, it is too soon for them to claim recovery. So, these women are on a journey to heal while simultaneously leading in new environments. The key for these female leaders is to aspire and deepen their resiliency. Studies show that silencing can weaken women's immunity, and the challenge for this type is to pay attention to their bodies and minds, join new communities, and stop the cycle of silencing so their purposeful voices can emerge.

As a researcher, it is hard for me to always stay objective and neutral. Hearing brilliant women doubt their own abilities or question if they have a voice that others will follow makes my chest hurt, and my breathing constrict. Given all the deficits facing our country and the world, we need these voices at the table, in the boardroom, and at the podium. I do not want part of their voices—I want their full voices. Only 46 percent of my participants could describe their healing in ways that suggested they fully recovered. The majority of them, 54 percent, are still facing day-to-day silencing that is keeping them from their full selves. It is

also true that those in this category had the highest self-silencing scores over all other groups. I imagine there are multiple layers and complexities to their silencing, and this takes time to name and to heal.

As one can imagine, these four types are not static categories, and as women propel forward, they may move into other groups. If staying in place keeps them silenced, women need to move, resign, and start somewhere new. As female leaders aspire and find their resiliency, they will eventually transition into Voice Re-inventors.

Every time I speak on my research, I will later have women approach me or email me saying, “I knew my type the minute you described them.” I do not need to create an assessment for women to self-identify where they are landing. As more female leaders recognize their current type, they can begin to have different conversations with themselves and others about what it is that they want. Can they pioneer and innovate, which will allow them to stay and lead? Or do they need to transition and reinvent so they can lead with full voice? Regardless of the chosen path, the journey is slow, and at times it may feel like several steps forward and a couple of steps back. It takes time and requires patience.

As with any social science experiment, it is problematic to name a direct and consistent correlation between two human factors. Women may opt-out of leadership for multiple issues. When feeling silenced is part of the opt-out decision, they may not experience the shifts or changes they hoped to see with just a job change. They need to approach their healing from silencing in ways similar to that of healing from any traumatic experience.

## **VOICE EFFICACY**

In chapter 7, I described all the different speech acts that we need to develop so that distinction can emerge, allowing us to speak with a level of fluency and effectiveness that our leadership positions require. The concept of efficacy suggests not just skill, but a

personal belief that one possesses an essential ability to use those skills with consistency to obtain results. One good swing of the club does not make me a golfer, especially since I have never played golf in my life.

As women grapple with their silencing and the paths to recovery, it is crucial to recognize that voice efficacy cannot exist without practice and a sense of agency. As an agent of my voice, I choose what and how things are spoken; I also choose how I remain silent. I love the Biblical example of Adam saying, “The woman made me do it,” all said as he gulped down the forbidden fruit. I am also sure we have all said, “if you had not done \_\_\_\_, I would not have said \_\_\_\_.” One of my dirty little vices is watching reality TV, and if I had a dollar for every instance I heard a woman on some *Housewives* show say, “She came after me first,” I would have my Starbucks habit paid for an entire year. We give our agency away when we say that something outside ourselves created a voice reaction. True efficacy with voice means that I own the belief that I am the only one who can initiate a voice reaction.

It means I will remain silent when it is clear that speaking will not get the desired outcome. It means knowing the proper timing, cadence, tone, and objective. It means speaking on issues that are important regardless of consequence. Efficacy is often developed in the furnace of controversy and tension. It comes from using voice to speak on issues that challenge, promote, or appraise a situation despite the inherent fear or risk attached to the situation. Even when an individual faces fear in a voice situation, those with higher voice efficacy will be more willing to speak with calm clarity at the moment, or shortly after the body’s fear reaction subsides.

There are many ways to have a purposeful voice—anger is certainly a motivator. I think everyone has had a “that’s enough” moment and voice will automatically emerge. These declarative opportunities might be powerful, but for there to be a sense of efficacy—one burst or blurt is never enough. Leaders need to show fidelity to their words and communication with the consis-



tency of speech acts and reactions. Anger can also be a significant subtractor to leadership and may need to be used sparingly.

Sometimes efficacy can develop when messages are aligned with the dominant discourse, not to assimilate but to use language that is less controversial. As women have repeated successes using non-threatening language choices, efficacy can build as trust increases. None of this can be done without an adequate level of emotional intelligence, otherwise known as Emotional Quotient or EQ. EQ is not just about knowing our own emotion and regulating reaction; it is also about being able to read a room and demonstrate agency with empathy. EQ is also highly needed when women have an unsuccessful voice attempt. Leaders are always fallible, and when our words do not come out right, our EQ helps ease the bruises from sharp elbows and knees that can often accompany our communication. Women will be more likely to see the entire context for what happened with voice instead of fixating on the sensation of not feeling heard.

Having voice efficacy is not easy, nor does it happen by accident.

Women in leadership who have contracted the silencing virus do not just heal; it requires intention. How they choose to speak, leverage their silence, share their stories, and utilize speech acts are just as important as knowing their business or industry. Communication is not some soft skill that can be taught by doing a self-study book or putting your signature on the sign-up sheet for a two-hour seminar that must be attended to show compliance. There is nothing fluffy about leveraging voice. I argue it is the key to women advancing in their careers. I also believe it is fundamental to how women make sense and communicate to others the different intersections of their femaleness, race, leadership, and other characteristics.



Cindy was raw and direct in my interview with her. She walked me through her experience of silencing and what she endured, but

she made a point that others might not have made. She discussed her double bind. Not only was she black, but she was also an immigrant. Her parents worked hard to ensure she could attend college and have a career that far outweighed any success they may have gained in the world. She received a strong message from them—do not walk away from money and do not throw away anything you have worked hard to achieve. In her case, it kept her in what she described as a war zone. She stayed in a position working in an organization that made her unhappy, and she experienced silencing far too long.

She began as a resolute propeller. She shared the following with me, “My parents came with nothing. I’m making the kind of money people would die to make. I’m comfortable; I can do anything I want; my kids are prospering.” She described what her parents would think of her leaving a high-paying position. “‘What? You’re leaving because someone’s annoying you at work? You better get that money, girl.’ So, yeah, I stayed.”

Her healing did eventually come—like others; it took years before she could look back and see the war zone and “death by many slashes” as something from the past versus something that she still lives. She found space to reinvent herself and become an innovative pioneer; as she described that space, she glowed with the knowledge it brought.

**CARING FOR SELF**

(and all the ways women are getting it wrong)

*Silencing is an awful feeling because the minute it happens, it's like imposter syndrome, and you start crushing yourself. The first thing you say is, "Was it my fault? Did I do something wrong? Should I have handled it differently?" I think that's everybody's first question, that maybe I shouldn't have said that and maybe it isn't a good idea.*

—Executive Director

Linda, although very driven from my perspective, did not describe herself as such. After graduating college, she waitressed and then became a bicycle courier in Washington, D.C. Her career included moving in and out of blue-collar and white-collar positions within commercial construction, carpentry, local government, and nonprofit. She described how her parents wanted her to be a girl, but did not necessarily send the right messages of what that meant when it came to behaving like one and all the insecurities that may be gender-related.

“What I learned in construction about the imposter syndrome is that men hardly ever had it. I watched men who knew nothing about what they were doing or the problem at hand and being like,

‘Oh, I can fix that!’” She talked about the bravado she saw emulating from her male colleagues that did not resonate with her or other females. She described how sometimes that boldness is false and you cannot trust it; she also admitted she learned from this. She adopted a practice that allowed her to tap into that inner bravado and jump into problems trusting her intelligence, skill sets, and ability. She too could wing it and figure things out.

Her ongoing leadership development was to say *no* to the imposter syndrome and to accept that everyone, including men, sometimes suffer from part of it. “I have relearned this lesson over and over. I expect people that make a lot more money, running bigger organizations, have a plan and a strategy. I have learned many times they don’t. Even if they’re making millions running huge organizations, they have no strategy!”

She made an important distinction in her interview when she described her silencing experiences. She knows that everyone is trying to figure this thing called life and leadership out. No one has it completely together but when you do have something down, if you do have a strength, run with it and leverage it.

For Linda, she did have the strength of strategy. She talked about all the operational leaders who had tactical abilities but lacked in strategy. “Being strategic as a leader is actually exceptional, or certainly not common, which is part of my leadership journey. A, recognizing that, and B, claiming that. This *is* something I’m good at.”

What I appreciated about this participant was her ability to share some things that caused her to feel silenced and undermined in her past and how that impacted her. She was also able to describe current things that mute her for short moments, but those do not change who she is in the world or cause her to feel like she has the silencing virus. At present, her ontology does not shift when someone or something tries to silence her.

Linda was able to take her righteous anger over social injustice and use it to her benefit. As a member of the LGBT+ community, she watched the silencing of marginalized women and used her tenacity to create change. She became the executive director of an

independent nonprofit focused on systems of health and community and refused to be associated with organizations that she perceived were getting it wrong.

She admitted that at times, her journey seemed accidental, but the reality is that everything she did moved her in a specific direction. She became a leader focusing on issues she found most valuable. She likened it to building her own ark—she built it, and the rain came. “I learned a lot on the job, but I was also making shit up every day.”

Her career path included one executive director role leading to another. She allowed the shifts and was open to being recruited into new roles—all with a focus on systems of access she deemed broken. Through it all, she earned a master’s degree and continued her voyage of being a self-directed learner. Not everyone can create a start-up or handle the complexity of continuous change. However, these elements created a bold invitation for Linda that no consistent operational role of just “keeping the wheels on” could provide.

When she described silencing in her younger years while on construction sites, it was primarily by men. In that setting, she could not be heard and was never associated with a good idea. She learned to manage it by finding people the foreman would hear from and planting her concept with them in ways they would voice. It was always another man (and sometimes he was not even sober), but it worked. Though her silencing was overt and direct, Linda found a way, albeit roundabout, to make her voice heard.

In her white-collar positions, the silencing was more concealed, but once she was able to identify it, she used similar tactics. She just needed to ensure her idea became spoken by someone else—again, typically a man on the board. What once felt personal now became a system to navigate so that she could lead well.

The silencing encounters she experienced with women were less pronounced and at times more insidious and difficult to navigate. Here it was personal and was less about gender and more about queen bees and intimidation. After a while, she was able to identify the women in each of her roles that were making voice

hard. Everyone who has been silenced by a relationship knows the name of their silencer. Linda knew her person (I changed her name to Sylvia). “Oh my God, she’s my Sylvia. There is one in every job I take!”

She also described a level of silencing that to many may be unfamiliar. As a lesbian, she often felt silenced by gay men.

I think the greatest betrayal is from the people that you’re closest [to]. I have higher standards for them, and the betrayal is greater. In fact, it was somewhat worse in the LGBT+ community. The tension between women and men was actually in some ways, worse. I think because we were in a group under siege, we needed to hang together. We just had very different ideas of what that meant. We were fighting for equality, but we couldn’t march it out equally. That betrayal in the trenches is much more personal; it’s much more emotional.

Linda reminded me that within every group of privilege, there is marginalization. In every marginalized group, there is also the privileged. These constructs of value never seem to shift, and they become part of the intersectionality that is unique to each person.<sup>1</sup>

She, like others I interviewed, described how feeling silenced put her in a cognitive space that resulted in her “worrying things to death.” She described the most significant impact of silencing as the sleeplessness she encountered regularly. The cognitive spin of the virus can certainly change sleeping patterns. However, she did not just feel the spin when she experienced her own form of silencing—she also felt the residual effects of seeing silencers continue to suppress others. For her, this caused a great deal of pain, but it also motivated her to act. This is a typical response from Innovative Pioneers and Voice Reinventors.

Her recovery from these silencing experiences involved many layers. One was to leverage her strengths. Once she realized what she was dealing with—another “Sylvia,” she found ways to release the personal pain to get strategic. She discovered how to bring like-minded people together, and in some cases bring adversaries

together, to move work forward. She learned how to navigate politically, go around, create her same idea in others, or move through, under, and above to position her leadership.

Linda also described a strategy that is important with those who have found recovery from silencing—care through community. She called it the Kitchen Table. “You need your own kitchen table at your level.”

## THE KITCHEN TABLE

There are those people in your life, whether they are friends from community, work, church, or school, who have “refrigerator rights.” These are the individuals who do not need permission to open up your pantry, fridge, or cabinet drawers to find a beer, snack, or rummage for silverware. They are part of your inner circle and need no invitation. I love being close enough to others to give them refrigerator rights. If they want something, they just find it on their own. Sometimes they unload the dishwasher and put things in all the wrong places—but they do it without apology. It is always a privilege to have kitchen table relationships with others.

Linda found this at multiple levels in her career. She had it in her nonprofit world through Facebook groups and listservs. She had communities of practice groups, book clubs, and social circles that allowed her to kvetch on real issues of leadership. They understood her context enough to sit at her kitchen table and support her when silencing encounters surfaced. She never needed to face those issues alone.

It is important to note that the small nonprofit space is an interesting niche. Executive directors are the equivalent of the CEO but often without the c-suite of expertise working alongside them. Sometimes executive directors have to be the chief financial officer, chief fundraiser, chief strategist, and then once staff come on board, also be chief HR officer. Even the smartest struggle to perform all of the various roles required, and executives at large

organizations may not face the same dynamic. Also, nonprofit EDs make substantially less income than executives in private industry. Depending on their annual budget, they may be paid five figures, and if they do make it into a six-figure bracket, they can suffer public criticism for earning too much.

For an ED to have any level of success, they must have a strong relationship with their board of directors. Linda was able to find a group of other people who understood this context. Her community became her sounding board and thought partner.

I have a kitchen table in my coaching practice. I got my academic training at Georgetown University, and as an alum, I have access to every other coaching program graduate through a portal and listserv. I get emails every day from different members of that community who post challenges, ask questions, seek advice, and offer up resources. It has been one of the most supportive and practical communities of practice I have ever encountered. I also have a local kitchen table with trusted colleagues and coaches in the Denver area. We get together regularly over meals to share, learn from each other, and provide support. I cannot imagine my life or career without them. I know I will never feel the isolation of silencing again because of these kitchen tables. I wish they hadn't been mostly absent earlier.

Female leaders must find these tables to emerge from silencing and find voice efficacy; I believe it is imperative for their leadership trajectory, sustainability, and regard.

## **SELF-REGARD**

I know this chapter is named “Caring for Self,” but “caring for self” and “self-care” are getting mixed up. I have to be honest; I have outlawed the term “self-care” from my vocabulary. Women, answer this for me. What is the first thing that pops into your head when you hear someone say you need to improve your self-care? . . . I bet it has something to do with food and exercise.



We have somehow tangled up self-care with self-discipline. Let me caveat what I am about to say with the disclaimer that everyone needs to manage their health in a way that is unique and specific. Sometimes allergies, sensitivity, and physician orders require choices that involve elimination. However, there is a blanket assumption with self-care that I think might be false. For instance, we tell ourselves that self-care is about putting the blueberry muffin down, walking more than 10,000 steps each day, and hitting the gym three times a week. Somehow becoming gluten-free, dairy-free, or sugar-free is another way we believe we must show care for self.

I am curious, when did deprivation become care?

Of course, we need to stay healthy, and that means moving regularly and not letting our body mass index exceed appropriate ranges. We should not overindulge; we should get good sleep; we should not smoke, do drugs, or drink heavily. Gracious—everybody knows! Knowing does not always equal doing, but that is not what this chapter is about. Nor is this chapter about adopting a thirty-minute meditative practice each day. I love all the research on mindfulness, and I believe it works, but again, it is not singularly what will help female leaders heal from feeling silenced.

Women need to do something else entirely when it comes to self-care in their leadership role. First, stop saying it. When it comes to recovering from a silencing experience, female leaders need to adopt the term self-regard.

When I regard someone highly, I believe they are honorable and trustworthy; it leads to me having respect for them. Sometimes people are highly regarded for their expertise, creativity, or abilities. In summary, high regard suggests a form of value. When I highly value someone—I demonstrate that in how I talk to them, talk about them, or how I act in their presence. People in high regard have a voice, and people listen to them.

I had high regard for my father-in-law. His name was Stan, and he passed in January 2019 at the age of eighty-seven. He was a fallible guy—so stubborn! But he was highly regarded. His primary speech act before he passed came in the form of inquiry. He

asked a lot of questions. Sometimes the question was, “What?” Beyond his need for us to repeat ourselves, he also wanted to know how those of us in the family were doing. He asked us about work, school, and the books we were reading, or movies we were watching. He wanted to know where we were going when we traveled, and always, he wanted to know if we were okay. He moved into a curious stage of life before he died. He tried to absorb information about everything around him. I rarely heard him make any declarations in that last year, but when he did, we listened. He also did not make very many requests, but when one surfaced—those of us in the family jumped to honor him. He was an indisputable, highly regarded man.

I believe that everyone has these folks in their life. They are far-from-perfect human beings that we care for and respect. We may even have a hard time describing why we have a high regard for them. We do not have to defend or explain why it is true. It just is!

Stan taught me something—he taught me that I am highly regarded as well. I get to choose whether I believe it or not. When I choose to believe in my own worth, this is the highest form of caring for myself.

It is not about calorie count or maintaining that slender physique. Self-care is not about deprivation to get to that desired goal on the scale or proving to yourself you can maintain a diet for more than a month. We only have one body in this lifetime, and it is good stewardship to maintain it, but let’s not make discipline the primary way we care for self.

Self-regard will eventually lead to self-care, but it starts by believing that our voice matters; our ideas are good; our mistakes are forgivable. Self-regard suggests that we are always worth it, and we are always good enough. It comes back to the idea that no one belongs here more than you. You and you alone have enough voice currency to make a difference.

When female leaders wrestle with the silencing virus and feel stricken in all their domains, the voice of wise discernment that is full of self-regard gets turned down. Part of the recovery process

involves finding that dial and slowly turning it up so that it drowns out the imposter syndrome and saboteur language, suggesting that we do not deserve a seat at the table.

We can say it but not believe it. We can fake it and never make it. Perhaps this is why the recovery process from silencing can take years. It takes time to start believing again what has always been true; it takes time to return to self and then stay put within.

Sometimes self-regard is eating dessert with a friend after dinner and laughing too loud, which will draw the dirty looks from the booth beside yours. Self-regard might mean you buy that new pair of shoes and update your wardrobe with clothes that fit your now-over-forty body. Self-regard is ending meetings with enough time to walk to the bathroom and stretch before you enter into another round of seated discussions. Sometimes regard is venting in a confidential way to that trusted colleague who you know will always hold your confidence. Self-regard can even mean dropping that much-needed f-bomb, especially if it makes those around you start to giggle about what the boss just said.

Self-regard is not always this severe and measured initiative. Sometimes it requires a lightness in a season of heavy. Often it means putting space between you and the negative people in your life so you can attract more positive. Other times, self-regard requires long, hard, ugly tears with hiccups. We need to let the body express—holding everything in is rarely good care.

## TEARS

Tears are a controversial subject, and I am not suggesting women in leadership adopt this practice, but there is something magical about crying your eyes out. The stuff that leaks from our eyes is not just a salty, watery substance prone to ruin eye makeup. Tears have a purpose.

Most are uncomfortable shedding tears in front of a witness, and when those tears come, we rationalize them to avoid feeling shame. For example, “Sorry, I’m just really tired,” or “I promised

myself I would not cry,” and my favorite “I don’t know why I’m crying.” Well, there are three reasons you might be crying.

There are different types of tears. First, there are basal tears that keep our eyes moist daily. Second, reflex tears wash out dust, eyelashes, and bathe our cheeks when we cut onions. Third and most important, there are psychic tears that form in response to something triggered by an emotional state. These tears carry higher concentrations of protein than the other two types. These tears force us to acknowledge something significant has been said or is going on.<sup>2</sup>

We cry because something has moved us emotionally, and it is never about the tears. It is about the event. My husband is known to be a weeper, but his tears typically come when something powerful or positive happens. That same event may cause others to smile, laugh with joy, or whoop and holler; my man tears up. Others cry when something painful is happening, or they are spit-tin’ mad—this is how I cry. Again, that same event may evoke temper in someone else, or cause another to go off in an angry rant or a silent shutdown. Reactions to any stimulus are going to be different, and yet we tend to demean our tears as a sign of weakness below all other responses.

As a coach and researcher, when I get the privilege of being a witness to someone’s tears, I slow the drilling down because I know we have hit oil. The tears are a signal to me that the conversation has shifted into something meaningful. If I was not at full attention before, I certainly am now. And yes, tears may come to a person by surprise, but that is because they were not fully aware of how important that “something” was until they began to use words. I find the best response when someone is shedding tears is to ask what is behind them. When they apologize for the tears, I like to remind them that tears indicate something is significant.

If we are going to apologize for something, let’s apologize for the yawns, sighs, and involuntary eye-rolls that we have perfected over time. Those biological responses are much more treacherous and indicate we have become indifferent and perhaps shamefully

superior in our thinking. I will take tears over those hurtful responses any day. Tears can be a healthy form of self-regard.

I also want to point out that silencing hurts. When women feel silenced, it is sometimes necessary to cry out the pain. The release of the tears with concentrated protein may create new forms of clarity that allow different choices in speech acts to emerge. Tears remind us that we should be highly regarded. When shed, they can be a source of healing and should not be a source of shame.

## OVERPLAYED BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are a necessary ingredient if we are to have a healthy loaf of self-regard. It is also one of those elements that if we are not careful, we will overly season or leave out entirely. In both instances, what we are trying to bake will become inedible.

When women overlay their boundaries, they demonstrate protective tendencies and the kitchen table concept with peers may become impossible. It is hard to give someone refrigerator rights in your life if you never invite them over. I have coached countless female leaders who I believe put too much distance between themselves and others. They rarely let anyone peak underneath the hood of their professional leadership. Often their inner belief system suggests that to be safe, secure, successful, and professional as an executive leader, they must limit their openness, avoid nonprofessional interactions, or make themselves slightly inaccessible. This is a mistake.

To this day, I remember a compelling experience with a hospital CEO named Ruthita. I was an HR practitioner—barely noticed in the organization, but she noted me and made efforts to be friendly. On one particular day, I was having a twenty-six-year-old meltdown and was thinking about resigning. I did not report to leadership at the hospital level; my boss sat in a system office. I decided to take a risk and ask for time with Ruthita before making my decision. I called up her executive assistant, a woman who knew how to be friendly, and asked for twenty minutes. The assist-

ant said she would get back to me. I only waited about five minutes when the assistant called back to say, “Ruthita said come now.” She had a scheduled mammogram down in Medical Imaging, and she wanted me to walk and talk with her as she headed to her appointment.

I only got five minutes that day—Medical Imaging was not that far of a walk when you already work in a hospital, and I did not stay with her to chat during her exam (boundaries!), but those five minutes were all I needed. She gave me empathy, perspective, and undivided attention for that short period. I chose to stay, and I learned a powerful lesson from this female CEO. She was accessible, creative, and did not hide her fallible human being self. I was welcomed into her space, and these interactions rarely happen in authentic ways when we have to schedule a formal appointment for two weeks down the road.

I can see my email filling up with horrible messages now. How dare I suggest women drop their boundaries and disclose health issues to connect. *Crikey!* (*Facepalm*) Of course not! Instead, I am suggesting we need to be human first. We do not have to be cold, uncaring, uninvolved, or “Spock-like” in our interactions. The guardedness I have seen so many women demonstrate in leadership speaks more about insecurity and fear than it does self-regard. It can be risky to lower boundaries and connect with people in the moment. It is far easier to remain separate, aloof and shielded with executive assistants, calendar slots, and pre-approved agendas. Sometimes care happens in unscheduled moments—we just have to be willing to lower our guard and not overplay our boundaries. It is one of those mysterious ways of showing executive presence. Those with a high sense of self-regard are women who know how to have boundaries, but they limit them, especially when they interfere with authentic connection.

I now want to speak to the opposite of what I also sometimes see, which is little to no boundaries.

## CREATE BOUNDARIES

I believe maintaining accessibility and visibility is an essential form of leadership and is something employees will sometimes complain is missing. I hear this often from my clients who have complex executive roles. In their efforts to minimize complaints, their reactions can sometimes make things worse. They schedule town hall meetings, publish more frequent newsletters, and overschedule their calendars in an attempt to meet with everyone who requests time. This is a problem and rarely works. First, it can be inauthentic, and second, it can demolish a leader's stamina, and the calendar becomes the shepherd of all interactions; this violates personal boundaries that every leader needs to have in place.

One of my biggest complaints about electronic calendars (Google, Microsoft Office, etc.) is that these programs have taught us to only think in precise increments. Meetings are typically an hour or ninety minutes. If we are lucky, we can work within thirty-minute time frames. All-day sessions we spit and polish and then call them a retreat. Who are we kidding? It is just a nine-hour meeting with a one-hour lunch break, but hey, you can wear jeans!

What if we guarded our time better on our calendars and did not allow every second of the day to be scheduled? What if meetings were fifty-three minutes instead of sixty? What if there were seven-minute standing huddles instead of long sit-down discussions? What if twenty minutes became the norm versus thirty minutes? When we do not manage our calendars, they control us, and neither Google or Microsoft care if boundaries are violated.

To have a boundary means to mark the limits of something—to have a dividing line that is not crossed.

People are human and will cross other people's boundaries regularly and by accident. We have to be wise with our speech acts and declare what we can tolerate versus what we cannot. We each have to show discernment in interactions and determine who we keep close at the kitchen table, and who we keep at a distance. We also cannot care more about other people than they care for them-

selves. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure bodies, minds, and spirits are getting ample attention and self-regard.

Computers, software programs, and other technologies are different; they should not get to exceed their limits or cross our dividing line. People are behind the technology, but we are so wired to scroll and click that we do not take the extra few seconds to type in different durations. This needs to stop. The people attending and the requesters of time will eventually figure out how to speak clearly and decisively in shorter meetings. They will learn to walk and talk or be open to huddles without carefully crafted agendas. Shorter meetings allow more time to address all our personal needs that we are quick to overlook.

Boundaries give us time to oscillate—to move and swing back and forth. Limits allow us to think, reflect, and prepare. We can eat, chew, and swallow; we can use the bathroom. When we have time to center, we slow down, breathe, speak better, listen deeply, and show distinctions in how we use voice and silence.

One of my favorite books that I often share with clients is *The Power of Full Engagement* by Loehr and Schwartz.<sup>3</sup> They describe what many people are guilty of, which is not noticing when energy levels hit crucial low points. We drive fast on empty and then hope a two-week vacation over the summer will fuel our tanks enough to get us through another five months of work until we hit the holidays and take another short week off. Then we wonder why we are always sick with bronchitis every time we are away from work.

Our bodies are not designed for this type of stamina, and we must intermittently disconnect to be wholeheartedly engaged. We must oscillate our minds, muscles, emotions, and spirit in daily ways to stay healthy. This requires us to determine boundaries and show fidelity towards them.

Self-regard is not a flip of the switch—it can take time to foster and rediscover. When we have regard for self, it is easier to cultivate it in others and vice versa. It may require more authentic moments, kitchen table groups, boundaries with schedules, and releasing some of the preconceived notions of how we self-care. It also means that we acknowledge and leverage our strengths.



Having a boundary with scheduling and technology is just one example; I am sure there are volumes written on ways to address emotional and physical boundaries. Each person, reader, and leader need to find ways to maintain boundaries so that words are filtered, physical space is honored, and time is managed. These constructs in our life rarely work themselves out by accident. It takes intention, and most often, it requires declarative speech acts.



Linda was one of those participants who did not mince words. She was direct, unapologetic, but most important; she was wholehearted with strong self-regard. I doubt there has ever been anything she barely did; I think of her as a one-hundred percenter.

I don't always get it right, but I am good at what I do. And even when I forget that, my therapist reminds me. But I can objectively own that I have this track record now. After almost 20 years of being a non-profit executive director, I have left every organization I've touched stronger, in a better place, more influential, more strategic. I grow organizations, and I do it well.

She described how her sense of self and her abilities grew in time. She built her relationships by staying open to moments and creating kitchen table communities. She no longer ties her self-confidence entirely to her work. She also no longer refers to herself as a silenced female leader. She made important distinctions that women are not always the ones silenced, and straight white men are not always the silencers. Men in general play an active part in this complex phenomenon of voice and silence. Their role is covered in the next chapter.



## II

# THE IMPORTANT ROLE MEN PLAY

*He didn't even give me the opportunity to speak.*

—I. T. Vice President

*I don't think I have ever been silenced by a man.*

—Nursing Executive

*Two men have silenced me, but it was also men who helped me recover.*

—Construction Company President

*I had a CEO that said to me, "I'm not really comfortable with women because I've always worked with guys."*

—Vice President, Restaurant Company

**W**omen in leadership experience men in multiple ways.

Some women never experienced silencing from men—only women. Others describe the opposite and provide story upon story of how they were treated poorly by men. Often it was the boss; other times, it was a peer. Direct reports, board members, stakeholders, or customers were sometimes part of the narrative. It appears there is a long horizontal continuum with shocking sexist behavior at one end and supportive female ally behavior at the other.

Katrina, an attorney by trade, spoke about these extremes in her interview. Part of her job required her to spend time overseas in war-torn countries; she also worked various roles in Washington, D.C. After twenty years of work experience, she took a position at an independent organization, and it was in this role, she encountered things she never thought were possible.

Ironically, my silencing has all been at this institute. All the time before when I'd worked in very male-dominated fields as a prosecutor, I worked with federal agents, most of them older than me, even when I was a young director and the people working for me were retired cops, the irony of it is all those careers, working in all those situations with military, I *never* felt silenced. Men respected what you did as long as you were competent and worked hard.

I am sure some of my readers have been seeking more details throughout this book about who silenced who and how. I could tell you overt things like men throwing chairs, using derogatory language, and making threats. I could tell you about nasty comments directed toward female leaders in employee surveys or through compliance hotlines. I have heard participants describe the way they were treated in board meetings, made fun of by peers, or ignored for weeks on end. Katrina spoke about her time in Yemen, Libya, and other war zones as less dangerous than some of her encounters here in the states with men who psychologically silenced her.

A colleague I met after speaking at an international conference asked me to consider his client, Katrina, for my research. She and I both agreed, and her story was a challenging one for her to share and for me to hear; she was deeply silenced by a man and then an organizational culture that did not want to accept accountability for internal failures. The details about what happened belong to her alone and ultimately distract from the importance of what is most significant. Even when bad men do bad things, there are more good men just around the corner. I will never forget her

describing Ken, her male coach, and the role he played in her voice recovery.

He got me to take better care of myself. I got him as a male coach because I needed somebody to answer, “Is this normal behavior or not? Is this okay or not? I’m going in to meet with my boss, what do I say?” I literally did not have a voice. I had totally lost my voice. I couldn’t speak normal[ly] anymore.

Katrina had significant experience at a senior level. Her silencers were men. However, what was also true in her story was that a man made an enormous difference.

There are lots of specific examples of silencing encounters within well-known organizations that women in my research shared. Ultimately, I do not think the specifics matter. I can sensationalize the findings, but that is just another form of problem admiration. I prefer to instead talk about how women are moving beyond the silencing and healing. Men, like Ken, are a vital part.

I have said this before and will say it again; there are no villains in this story. This chapter is to honor the important role men play in the lives of female leaders. Our male colleagues have a lot of agency in how they influence and partner with women. This section is written to create just enough discomfort with my male readers, so they begin to reflect on ways they might be able to use their voices differently in this socially constructed thing we call the workplace.

Before I say more about the healing role men play, I want to frame the data because it emphasizes why understanding the silenced female leader is so significant.

What do we know?

## **MEN NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE SIGNIFICANCE**

I saved the recent data on women in the workforce for chapter 11 for three reasons. First, if I led with it, I believe the book’s tone

would move away from the importance of understanding the phenomenon of feeling silenced. Second, sometimes the story behind statistics reinforces the tiresome narrative that all white men are to blame. This is problematic, especially if we want to see change; we have to create an invitation that allows all men to be allies. Lastly, some see data as another form of *blah, blah, blah*. Many have seen it and know it—and are tired of it not changing. Somehow it has become the backdrop of peeling wallpaper for our society, and we just learn to accept it despite how much we hate it. I have to agree! When I look at the numbers, I often find myself slipping into problem admiration, and I find it exhausting.

Perhaps though, we now have another perch to analyze problems that provides a new viewpoint.

We have a new frame for a silencing phenomenon that impacts women in leadership at director and executive levels; this alone is hard for women in these roles to admit, but it is happening. Here are some key points I'd like to recap.

1. Feeling silenced can be experienced like a virus.
2. Some women are opting out and making job changes because of this, which impacts their trajectory and contributes to the gap. If I dare generalize my research, there is a good chance that less than 25 percent of women will recover from a silencing experience without leaving their organization. The majority of women I studied have not recovered and continue to lead as a silenced female, suggesting their organizations have not received their full potential.
3. Recovery from silencing is not easy or fast.
4. Women first need to name it, then untangle the relationships, systems, and self to make sense of what happened.
5. Healing can begin when they choose who they invite into this process. Silencing can feel isolating, and sharing the phenomenon with others is critical.

There is an additional backdrop to all this, which includes a lot of data to support the importance of finding voice.

## MEN—PLEASE KNOW OUR STATISTICS

First, in the United States, we know that women make up around 47 percent of the workforce. We also know that women are more educated than men from the following statistics:

- Women earn 57.2 percent of all bachelor's degrees; they have been frontrunners since 1982.
- Women earn more master's degrees, and this has been true since 1987. Latest statistics show that 59.2 percent of master's degrees are female-obtained.
- In regard to doctorate degrees, women earn more (52.7 percent) and have since 2006. Law schools are 51.27 percent female, and medical schools are 50 percent female.

Additionally:

- Of these women earning degrees, a third are women of color.
- It is projected that by 2060, women of color will represent the majority of all women in America.

In 2018, at a global level, 75 percent of companies had at least one woman in senior leadership compared to 66 percent in 2017, but that means there are 25 percent of companies in the world that have zero women at the senior leadership table.

The number of businesses within the United States with at least one woman in senior management went from 69 percent in 2017 to 81 percent in 2018. This is a good upward trajectory, but at the CEO or president level, the percentage held by women decreased from 23 percent to 21 percent.

Despite the 80 percent domination of women in healthcare, only 11.2 percent of this industry's CEOs are female. Despite the equal percentage of women enrolling in medical school, only 39 percent of medical school faculty are women. Women of color are underrepresented in every area of medicine.

Although women have been applying to law school in equal numbers to men for twenty years, the white male continues to dominate this industry. Only 45 percent of women are associates, and only 22.7 percent make partner. Under 2 percent of black women hold partner positions.

Only 5 percent of S&P 500 CEOs are women. Again, another downward trend. There were more in previous years, but as they stepped down, they were replaced by men. Only 21 percent of board positions in the S&P 500 are filled by women; 2.8 percent are women of color. The S&P reports suggest that only 11 percent of their high earners are women. In my home state of Colorado, as of 2018, there were only two female CEOs of public companies. I have heard there are more CEOs named Dan or John than there are women in CEO positions.

We saw a record number of women serving in government in 2019, but they have a long way to go before they hold equal footing with their male colleagues. The 116th United States Congress saw 23.4 percent women in the House of Representatives and 25 percent of women in the Senate. At the U.S. state level, 28.7 percent are female legislators.

In academia, the numbers tell a similar story. While women hold nearly half of all academic positions, only 38.4 percent are tenured. They are more likely to be found in lower-ranking assistant or associate professor positions. Women of color in academia are far below 10 percent. More women are becoming college presidents, but the numbers only hover at 30 percent.

When it comes to management, we see different trends. Women are leading in the middle. They hold half of all management or professional related occupations. White women in America hold the majority with Latino women holding a little over 4 percent, black women 3.8 percent, and Asian women 2.4 percent. The higher women go in the workplace, the less they are represented.

When women lead, we are more likely to find them in human resources roles or working in healthcare, education, nonprofit social, or community service organizations. We are less likely to see



them in energy, manufacturing, mining, STEM, finance, real estate, IT, or software services.

The statistics for women in other countries are not significantly different. There is data for Canada, Japan, India, Australia, and Eastern European countries. The percentages may shift by a few points here or there, but there is no place on earth where we are seeing women lead at the same level or percentage as men.

These statistics are based on the most recent data collected by the global nonprofit Catalyst.<sup>1</sup> This organization, founded in 1962, is dedicated to building workplaces that work for women. Part of their mission is to work with some of the world's most powerful CEOs and collect pioneering research that advances women in leadership. They say that progress for women is progress for everyone.

Men may argue that their organization is different. They are more progressive and seat a high percentage of women at the table. This may be true, but men may not know that the women they are sitting beside are making less for similar work. The statistics on the pay gap could fill volumes. To keep it simple—we are far from closing it. The International Labour Organization released reports in the first half of 2019 suggesting the gap, based on trends from the last twenty years, will not close until 2070. I'll be dead by then.<sup>2</sup>

## PLEASE SEE THE BIG PICTURE

I could throw out more statistics, but the picture should be quite clear by now. Women make up almost half the workforce; they are the most educated; they hold half of the middle management positions, but only 15 percent of executive positions across the country are held by women. They are not promoting into higher levels of leadership for which they are capable. There are many factors involved in this phenomenon, but the question becomes, how is silencing an unexplored factor?

Given the data behind the big picture, the first thing men need to do is start asking an important question—where are the women?

One of the faculty at the Fielding Graduate University posted an article on OpEdNews when the issues of the MeToo movement surfaced in surmounting ways. His piece is called, *And Then Mother Earth Said, "Me Too!"* When Four Arrows (Don Jacob) sent me this article in January of 2018, I was startled by some of what I read. First, we have forgotten so much. Second, our word choices stem from sexist and misogynist places that many remain unaware.

What we need to remember is that this country, populated by Native American people, treated women in far more equal ways than the European settlers. "Research that seldom makes it into popular media clearly reveals that most Indigenous cultures, especially those in North America were structured on complementary gender systems where gender roles and responsibilities were egalitarian, interdependent and highly respectful of each other." Four Arrows goes on to describe how the indigenous people often refused to meet with all-male European councils because the European women were not present; they were not sitting at the table as equals.<sup>3</sup>

This is an amazing concept to me. What if our male colleagues said, we will not sit down to do business with you until you bring an equal number of women to the same table? The one token female at the executive level is not near enough. While that idea is marinating, let me bring up another important part of the big picture. We are unconsciously using derogatory words.

Words choices are often deeply rooted in a white male dominant discourse. I'll quote Four Arrows again, "Starting with language, think about the long-standing metaphors we often use to describe human relationships with the other-than-human world, such as virgin forest, control of nature, penetrating the wilderness, rape of the land. Such phrases are significant in creating and maintaining our current dysfunctional worldview." This scholar is referencing the importance of the female voice in the era of the MeToo

movement. There are plenty of everyday words that leaders use without thought.

Men—how often have you said something like the following:

- Why aren't you smiling?
- Not bad for a girl
- He's a good guy—look past what he says
- She's really articulate
- Try to manage your emotional responses

Now go back to each of these five statements and imagine saying them to a man.

This tends to be the best litmus test. Do you ask men why they aren't smiling? Probably not, so it isn't a great idea to say something like this to a woman. When your words to women are different than your words to men, we notice and feel it. This is not an invitation to include us in your locker room banter either. Just as women need to keep their banter restricted to safe and appropriate places, men need to do the same. Our words as leader carry a megaphone, and they reverberate throughout the organization. Care must be shown, which leads to another topic that may need a little more attention.

Have we ever stopped to think about our swear words? I think about them a lot—because I am known to use them. Every curse word originates from four places.<sup>4</sup>

First, we have religion, which is oddly the historical root of swearing in many languages. We use the name of God, Jesus, or another deity in vain. Then we get creative and pick holy, damnation, hell, or another religious word to be an adjective for the second category. Excrement. We like to throw out something about poop, pee, or some other type of bodily fluid or effluvia when we curse. Third, our swear words are about sex. I do not need to provide any examples, but it is astonishing how many biological body parts of both genders we can manufacture into swear words that most find taboo. The fourth category, which has lost some of its sting—disease. We may say, “Don't be such a

bloody idiot,” but since we are no longer in the eighteenth century, people do not take as much offense and may even laugh if you shout “a pox on you.”

Then there is the b-word that I believe belongs in its own category and is detrimental to all women. Bitch is a formal noun for a female dog, wolf, or fox. It can also be informal when we talk about an object. For instance, it has been a bitch of a week. As a verb, we say people like to bitch about stuff. I think we can all agree these examples are benign. However, when we use the word “bitch” as an informal noun and call a woman this, it is a game-changing damaging move. When women are working hard to find their voice, they should never hear they are a bitch.

Labels, in general, are devastating, and I think most people have grown unaware of how much we silence others when we use them without thought. We are all human beings first. Our attributes and conditions are always second, and anytime we use the bitch word, we are devaluing a woman down to the status of a dog.

Let me caveat all this by saying if you need to swear—by all means, swear! There is research to show how using taboo language is cathartic; it releases tension. If swearing were an Olympic sport, I am relatively certain women would win gold and silver. I am not suggesting anyone stop; it is a personal choice. Instead, I want to advocate that you create more consciousness around your word choices. Are we careless or careful? What will we outlaw in our vocabulary because it is far too demeaning? And, if I could be so bold, everyone needs to stop using the word bitch as a noun—even dogs deserve better.

Swear words are just a small example of language choices of which we have perhaps become unaware. We also use metaphors and other labels that do not serve women. It can be powerful when men notice this and adjust their language—not to be politically correct, but to be kind.

The call to action is to notice what we say.

If we do not notice something, we cannot change it.

## REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MALE ALLY

I have spoken at enough conferences to anticipate some questions. One of the issues that gets raised is the idea that men have become skittish around women because the MeToo movement has created some fear. They now shy away from wanting to mentor younger women lest they get accused of something.

Here is the first suggestion I have for being a great male ally—stop thinking *and* saying this!

Second, this is leadership by exception. Men and women can be friendly and professional. I spoke about this in chapter 4. A man's friendship in a professional setting can make a significant difference for a woman who experiences silencing.

Men, if you are worried about something, it may be indicative of a mistake you have made in your past. This blunder may need to be addressed, which requires using one of the sanctifying seven speech acts. Perhaps an apology. You also may need to declare your intentions. We need not be defined by our mistakes, and if you are serious about being a female ally, you won't need to worry because your focus will not create room for impropriety.

Eugene Hung, a columnist, considers himself to be a feminist Asian dad. July 2017, he wrote, "An ally is not defined as someone of privilege who speaks for a marginalized group. Rather, being an ally means boosting and drawing attention to an oppressed group's own voices, helping them to gain as large of an audience as possible."<sup>5</sup>

When men are allies, they amplify the voices of women. They notice when they are silent and invite them to speak. Being an ally means paying attention to the issues that women face. It is never about power, and I would argue, it might not even be about mentoring. To be a good ally is to partner with women in ways that suggest they are equal and heard.

When mentoring is requested, there are powerful ways men can establish the boundaries of a relationship with a female colleague. It is standard to create norms for groups that meet, such as being on time, no interruptions, come prepared, and so on. Men

and women can have norming conversations, in the same way; it just requires some use of voice and to not assume a shared knowledge of the obvious.

I also might be making an assumption, but if you are a man reading this book, I am pretty sure you are already taking the first step to being a great male ally!

## **SPECIFIC THINGS MEN CAN DO**

There are other things that position men to be successful with their female colleagues. First, I argue that using language to declare you are an ally is critical. Do not just say it to a small group of women. If you are going to declare this, do it universally to large audiences of both genders. Then please pay attention to how your language choices, metaphors, and remarks support or detract from the concept of being an ally.

It is also essential for men to stop minding their own business. I see this time and time again. Men often do not want to get involved when women treat each other poorly. They may refrain from speaking up when they see injustice. They may rationalize that as long as they behave like a good man, that is enough. It is a false assumption. Good allies defend, and speak up and out when they see injustice to women; even when it comes from another woman.

Sometimes men need to ask, “Where are the women?” They may need to advocate for shifting the dynamics on projects, teams, or divisions to ensure women are at the table. Do not rely on other women to do the female hiring or advocating. I was speaking to a female CEO recently who admitted she tends only to hire white men and admitted she is biased. When I explored what that was about with her, she replied that they are the most experienced. She did not feel she had time to mentor those with less work experience.

This CEO is not unique. Given the privilege of men in all industries along with the statistics I just mentioned, of course,

men are going to have more robust resumes. For the most part, they are the ones in all the executive roles. Men play a role when they are willing to prepare women for the next level of leadership or advocate for a female hire even when there might be a male candidate with slightly more experience. If you want to go one step further, get involved by making sure their salary is not contributing to the pay gap.

Men cannot assume that women will always advocate for other women.

To advocate for women with success, men also must pay attention to the greater context. If you are a male CEO, ask for data about the wage gap in your organization. Get curious about the number of women who seek promotion but are denied. Find out how many women are leaving the organization after they hit middle management. Executive men who choose to be allies need to understand the bigger picture and not just assume that because their organization has good statistics that this is enough. Their involvement can carry influence beyond their company when they start to notice the broader issues behind women in leadership.

For the men reading this who believe that being a good ally is about supporting women's initiatives and paying for leadership development programs, please know this is barely enough.

Money talks, but not nearly as well as you.

When you agree to spend thousands of dollars for women to have a full-day conference on women's leadership issues, you are in essence, holding a diversity training with everyone who is not white. The choir may already know the message well. Use the dollars also to ensure that men are being exposed to some of the same presentations on women's issues. Be prepared to have your male leaders become the minority audience in large groups of female attendees. Women want you there. When you show up, you send a strong message that you support them and are willing to go beyond the simple act of writing a check or advocating for the budget dollars.

Last, the most important way you can be a male ally is to be a friend to a female leader. Know her leadership story. If she has

experienced silencing—ask her to say more about what happened and how she is healing from it. Women are not sharing this information for a variety of reasons that are already covered. When men are curious, kind, and professional, they are creating part of the community that is often missing from so many executive female leaders' lives.

You can trust that she does not want to have sex with you. She doesn't. She is not going to be offended when you meet with her in your office with the door open versus closed. Nor will she think twice when you suggest coffee or lunch meetings and ask for separate checks. She does not expect you to rescue or save her. She does not need compliments about her hair, wardrobe, or appearance. She will, however, properly thank you when you sincerely compliment her on a project deliverable, an effective presentation, or a technical skill that she has mastered. When you decide to be friends with a female leader, she will appreciate the equity in the friendship and most likely will reciprocate.

There will always be the exception, but men need to manage what it means to be a male ally with the majority of women in mind. Recovering from feeling silenced is a steep road to journey, and when men are willing to be on the path of healing, they can make a big difference. There may also be those men who feel their own type of silencing.

## **MEN WHO FEEL SILENCED**

I have been approached by several men over the years intrigued by my research but somewhat unsure what to do with it. I repeatedly hear them say they are thankful to have more tools or language to coach their female clients. Sometimes they reference having a female family member they can now better understand. I also hear motivation from them to be a more prominent male ally of women. And a few brave ones share with me that they too have felt silenced and wonder if my research extends to men.

Let me first address the brave by saying—I am not sure.



My research is solely with women, and yet I believe that when women find voice, they create a path for men to find it as well. There is a vast amount of research that suggests men and women communicate in different ways and styles, but I do not know if both genders experience and recover from silencing the same. Here is what I do know. Speech acts are not gender specific; distinctions with voice and silence are required of everyone; leadership is often seen as androgynous; and since women are just as prone to silence as men, we have to assume they are capable of silencing their male colleagues. We also have to accept that men silence men. All this suggests that men may need to pay attention to the silencing virus. Their domains of head, heart, spirit, and body may not experience the same symptoms, but it is reasonable to imply they are not entirely immune to the phenomenon.

As I have outlined some strategies in this book, they may apply to men as well. We cannot expect that men who identify as LGBT+ experience voice and silence the same way as a white, heterosexual, cisgender man. Nor can we expect that men of color have the same experiences. Each person has their leadership narrative and history with voice and silence. When men feel comfortable to share their stories with these same dynamics, it may open up even greater avenues of healing.

Sometimes the simplest tends to be the hardest. Ultimately, we cannot change what we do not notice. To notice something, we have to become more aware. Awareness happens when we enter into conversations, read material, study dynamics, learn statistics, and pay attention to nuances. It means we have to stop minding our own business and start paying attention to trends in our industries, workforce, and country. We cannot wait until issues arise in our organizations or personal lives before we decide to engage in conversations about the role of women. When we can participate in broader discussions, the horizontal plane opens up a lot of space for us to pivot in our views.

When we pivot on issues and see things in new ways, we may be able to create a more sustainable change by the way we talk and the way we use silence.

This chapter covered some high-level statistics that frame how important it is for everyone to keep the big picture in mind when it comes to voice and feeling silenced. Women deserve an equal seat at the table, and based on our education, we are ready to join. Once we get there, it is important that we not forget our own context; to do so may allow us to turn silencer on our own gender.

## REFUSING TO BECOME A SILENCER

*I think the biggest frustration for me in that last position was not really the silencing of me, but the silencing of my staff.*

—Nonprofit Executive

**T**amara was a self-described gregarious introvert with a heart for social justice. At birth, she was ready to lead. She learned early in her career that working in nonprofit spaces was her passion, but her career had to be fueled by the right mind-set. She chose to work in challenging political areas along with charitable organizations, always pursuing leadership roles that leveraged her strengths. She knew how to advocate for those without voices, but it often came at a price.

She experienced a dynamic that many women face; she put herself last. She was a straight, white woman working in marginalized communities, and she felt bad. She could marry the person she loved and get rights with benefits. She could travel or make purchases without the worry of who might be watching. She could always shower, wear clean clothes, and not worry about where she was going to sleep at night. She could be with her husband and children and not receive what felt like encounters of judgment from others. Her privilege brought a sense of blame, shame, and responsibility for those who did not always have the same access.

The emotional journey took a toll on her until she realized what it meant to work from a place of joy versus guilt.

She had to face parts of herself previously denied and reconcile that her guilt and lack of self-care or regard was creating a slow deterioration in her life and leadership that was not serving anyone. Her inner journey to find awareness on these tough issues deepened who she was as a person. Guilt cannot fuel a career path, nor can it alone make a difference. The depth of her consciousness swirled in rough waters when she found herself working for a white male attorney turned executive director who led from a perceived shallow mind-set. He did not have the same awareness of his social standing. He used his privilege as a platform, and his leadership was viewed as “very sexist.”

“He did not want to listen to women, even though we were running entire departments under him.” It was evident in the research interview she not only had her pain to contend with when she experienced this phenomenon; she also had the silencing of her team to consider. Every action she took impacted them at some level.

Silencing creates a great deal of collateral damage. It is a contagion. There are at least two ways I have found it spreads, and Tamara’s situation represents one of them.

## **A VIRUS LOVES INTERDEPENDENCY**

I have learned the hard way that every time I travel, I am putting myself at risk for some nasty cold or sinus infection. Planes are gross. We are touching seat belts, tray tables, overhead bins, and armrests that someone else has also felt and we do not know if their hands are clean. Heck, I do not know if my hands are clean. I can be one of those people that sprays or wipes Lysol, but I am always going to be at risk for something seeping into my system. I know God gave me white blood cells to fight off infection and mine are pretty kick-ass in typical situations, but they are some-

times short on superpowers. When there are so many people nearby—stuff spreads.

Unless we live in a bubble—we are going to get sick occasionally. The closer we live and work with others—the higher our risk will be for spreading and sharing. Such is life, and we find ways to cope with the inconvenience of a few colds or viral infections.

When I am sick, I always isolate. I move into another room to sleep, and I try to limit my family or client interactions. I do not want to spread my germs.

When female leaders feel inflicted with the silencing virus, they unintentionally start to isolate as well. As I have already covered, this is a mistake. We must move into community when we feel silenced, or our chances of recovery are too slim.

Therein lies the dilemma. When teams are interdependent with a silenced female leader at the helm, the entire body of people are at risk. Most business consultants, leadership development practitioners, and executive coaches argue that interdependency is a goal for teams to be successful. At its core, it suggests that I am not successful if you are not successful. I do not shine if you do not shine. Interdependency creates a different environment than mere dependency or independency.

If I am a dependent worker, I will focus on my projects and needs. I am reliant on authority not to interact with, but to tell me what to do. I work in a space that is dependent on a leader to control the work and the outcomes. Since I tend to only interact with others to be told what to do, I need not concern myself with anything except getting information. I can easily miss that my leader is wrestling with voice and silence and be less susceptible to the contagion.

There are times in crisis or when we are starting in our careers that dependency makes sense. In sustainable, high performing teams, this is rarely tolerated. More often than not, we see independent groups. Each member is a highly skilled practitioner doing their work with little interaction with others. We use analogies like swim lanes, or we complain people are siloed in their work. The control exerted is self-directed based on expertise allowing

me or my team to work in their scope with little interaction from above or beside. Although mutual influence may open up ways for silencing to spread, independence has a posture of standing straight. There is little leaning in.

When we lean in, we are more likely to work in a collective interdependent way. There is a shared understanding of what everyone is doing and how they are doing it. There are conversations to align and share leadership. It is a highly creative and mutually respectful space to work within. It also creates a messy space that allows for a silencing virus to quickly spread to each member. When a female leader is running an interdependent team, which is something difficult to cultivate and sustain, all members are going to notice and experience shifts in leadership. There are not just eyes on authoritative direction or eyes on self; here there are eyes on everyone within the team.

Silenced female leaders often lead silenced teams. Members of that team may begin to demonstrate some of the same self-protective tendencies of playing small, feeling unease with organization systems or adopting similar beliefs about perceived silencers. Tamarra described her reaction to the silenced team as follows: “The real thing that made me stand up was watching when he started to negatively impact people I supervised. Doing it to me is one thing, but when somebody else is harmed, oh, I’m going to stand up.”

It is rare for a female leader who has a strong relationship with her team built on mutual trust to experience viral silencing and her team to be unvarnished by that phenomenon. Most of the participants described how they diligently tried to protect their direct reports from anything that was happening above them, but they were not always successful. When teams behave in interdependent ways, which is always ideal, what happens to one member is often felt by the group. When a silenced leader tries to leverage the good work of her team, there can be a collective dismissal regardless of the men and women involved.

I heard example after example of women describe how their team’s project, idea, or participation in the organization was often dismissed or minimized because the systems that silence or the

relationships that silence lumped anyone of association together. Tamara used that dynamic as a catalyst for change. Her situation did not immediately end based on her RV-CARD<sup>2</sup> carrying expertise. It ended in an ugly way with legal action and a great deal of pain for everyone involved. But it ended.

The key for Tamara was that once she became more aware of how the team under her began to suffer, it moved her to take action. Yes, an opt-out was eventually needed, but it did not just launch her away from being a resolute propeller without recovery to an innovative pioneer with voice. It influenced her team to take action as well for their career purposes and the sake of their individual voices.

Leading interdependent teams is a leadership goal, but with it comes a shared experience of the good and the bad. Sometimes a leader's silencing is isolated, and the phenomenon is not shared with the team, mostly with good intention. This leads to the second way silencing spreads.

## **THE SILENCED BECOME SILENCERS**

I had the pleasure of interviewing a participant for my research who was so concerned about retaliation, she did not permit me to quote her in any of my publications. She did not want anything to be reflected on her in any way. I also had the pleasure of doing a research interview with a woman who had an experience with silencing that I would love to share. However, after I transcribed the interview and sent it back to her for review and comment, she sent me an email asking to be removed entirely from the research. She was worried that by sharing her story and seeing it in print, she would be keeping something alive that she preferred would end. In both cases, there was a form of self-silencing out of fear of what might happen next. There was also a level of discernment in both of these women that I respect.

What I have learned in these cases is that (a) when there is healing, there are words of discovery, and (b) it is easier to speak from our scars versus our wounds.

I attended a leadership event a few years ago, and one of the facilitators was experiencing a painful breakup with her significant other. She publicly shared some examples of how she had been cheated on and lied to by her partner. I remember feeling a little awkward about what she was sharing; it felt like too much disclosure, and I wondered how her story might change if she and her partner miraculously worked things out. How does someone go back in a public way to those who heard the first story and say, “By the way, my partner is less of a jerk now.” It’s hard to stuff liquid cheese back into the can.

This facilitator was sharing her pain from a place of open woundedness as these events have recently occurred. She was not sharing her learning from a place of scars. It is through our scars that the story takes on depth and meaning. When we speak from an open wound, the disclosure tends to be about how the other person wronged us, versus what we learned.

Everyone reacts differently to psychological wounds, which can be more traumatizing and dire than physical injuries. Silencing can be annihilating, especially when we are silenced by a relationship. Saying too much too soon can be a poor choice. Leaders are always saying, you complain up or out, but never down. However, when women are in the thrust of silencing and attempting to spare their teams from collateral damage, they can inadvertently become silencers by staying too quiet without context.

In an attempt to not speak with direct reports from a place of an open wound, women can get too logical, directive, hard-charging, or focused solely on the work and lose touch with the relationships. I spoke with participants who described their level of “stuckness,” creating a demanding nature in them with others. They believed they were marching to the orders of a silencer (especially a boss silencer), who wanted delivery on work regardless of her leadership perspective. It is the typical metaphor of ugly things rolling downhill fast.



A need to deliver and please a silencer can create tension with subordinates primarily when explanations are not provided. I had a research participant say she did not see how hard she became on others because she was blinded by her pain and discomfort. She created a sense of isolation and distance from others with good intention. She did not want her team to be exposed to the leadership dynamics she was experiencing, but what unintentionally happened is she became a silencer of her staff.

When this happens, women can take what might have been a previously independent or interdependent team and create a sense of dependency. Their need to control outcomes to “please up” can quickly deteriorate a team. Unlike in the first example where the virus likes to spread among an interdependent team and create a shared pain, here the silencing dynamic replicates by creating more silencers. There is an ugly truth in oppression that Paulo Freire so elegantly describes in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “The oppressed instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors.”<sup>1</sup> Somehow or somewhere along the way in this socially constructed world, silencing is synonymous with authority. At a conscious level, we know this needs to end, but there can be some unconscious damage before we reach this conclusion.

In the interviews with women, it was hard to assess their awareness of how their silencing experience resulted in them becoming silencers. It is safe to say that those who mentioned it were aware enough to create change in their leadership to ensure it did not continue. We cannot change what we do not notice though, and even if the silencing we succumb to is short, the impact can be prolonged for those on the receiving end.

The hard truth is that silencing is never contained. It spreads in ways that women rarely intend, and they can accidentally adopt silencing behavior in their attempt to cope with their dynamics. The only way to mitigate these forces at work is to bring them into open discussion with our RV-CARD<sup>2</sup>s in hand.

## TRAILBLAZING HURTS

Sometimes using words is the purest form of trailblazing. When we name something that others are reluctant to address, we speak the unspeakable. When we contest the current state of things, change has a chance to cultivate. We may see movement, leaning in, or a willingness to deconstruct something that does not work anymore. Women may feel silently or quietly supported by others who think and feel the same but have been disinclined to voice. There is always something powerful when someone puts words to an issue so that we do not have to—we can show our support with nods, smiles, and murmurs of agreement. We can corner them after the meeting and tell them how glad we are they spoke up, shake their hand, and congratulate their courage. All the while, we are also breathing a massive sigh of relief that we did not have to be the one that finally said it.

When I think of trailblazers, I tend to think of those who are first. I wonder what it was like to be the first female PhD in this country or the first female in space? There are those who are first to hold a public office in certain counties, towns, and states. I am confident I will live long enough to see the first female president of the United States. Being the first woman at anything is a true definition of a trailblazer. They did not arrive first by accident; it was through a lot of language and action.

Let's deconstruct the idea of being a trailblazer. This is a person who creates a path through a wild country. You do not create a route just by walking. Creating a trail requires hacking down tall weeds, moving logs out of the way, laying down stones, or toppling trees over raging waters so you can with a balanced step cross the current. Trailblazing requires tools—a machete comes to mind. I can hurt myself just walking across my recently mowed backyard. I cannot imagine the welts, cuts, scrapes, or injuries I would acquire if I was blazing a trail. It is hard and dangerous work.

When women use their voices to address what has been previously unsaid, they too can get hurt. It can create some psychological scrapes and bruises. I heard from several women who de-

scribed their voice now versus when they felt silenced. Their recovery has strengthened their voice while also creating risk and challenges. Not everyone in an organization is waiting and hoping for a female leader to lead with voice currency. Some might profit from working side by side with silenced female leaders as it allows their voice to be more dominant. They can retain their white male privilege or their queen bee status. When women recover in powerful ways to lead, workplace climate can get worse before improving, especially if her voice is used to address controversial topics.

Diane, an African American female, leading at an executive level within education, spoke about this in her interview by saying, "I can choose to disrupt issues at any time, and that doesn't mean I do it consequence-free. Am I willing to navigate those consequences as a result of pushing back on X? The more important dilemma is how do I live with myself versus how I live with them."

Kate, a hospital CEO, said, "I know if I don't have my voice in, I'm not right for the role. Having my voice in also brings consequences. You might not have your job." Having a voice *in* suggests a lot of different things. Most importantly, it indicates a woman is not passive on a topic. She is using language to contribute toward the topic, whether wanted by others or not. The challenge with moving from silencing to voice is that others may have gotten too used to the silenced version of you. Leading with a voice currency is always needed, but organizations and people do not always welcome what they need.

Sometimes organizations want to stay on a path that is well worn and does not invite discovery. They want to keep tromping on a dirt road that leads in circles when a new trail could bring innovation and increased revenue. Female leaders may lose their energy or drive when the organization continues to resist, or they may get consistently beat up and cut as they continue to trailblaze alone. It is hard being the only one up front when creating a new path with voice. Sometimes the trouble it brings may not seem worth it, and I find too many female leaders slipping into a passivity.

## ADULT DEVELOPMENT AND VOICE DIGRESSION

There are no static spaces in leadership. There is no “arrival” or level suggesting a person is so transformed they will never be a previous version of themselves again. There are various theories of adult development, and volumes are written about this topic, but the theories are all consistent in that they describe post-adolescents as always capable of learning and growing. Our brains are not fully baked when we reach whatever we deem the age of adulthood. Mental development, vertical development, or adult development continues throughout our lifetimes as long as we are open to it and believe we are never fully complete. Unlike learning more information, which can be representative in nature, adult development is about our ability to hold complexity, anxiety, polarities, and broader world views.<sup>2</sup>

My prevalent views often give insight into my stage of adult development. When I imbue self-centric behavior focused only on my needs, wants, desires, and interests, it is indicative that I am playing in the space of development that is self-sovereign. My impulses drive my interactions and behavior. Most human beings grow out of this stage; some do not.

When my views are on those around me and how they perceive me, it could be indicative of the socialized stage of adult development. Here I view myself through the lens of what others think or see as relevant. I may measure my outward appearance, worthiness, or belonging based on what my friends, neighbors, colleagues, or boss think. I am not as self-centric as I used to be; I have subordinated my self-interests, and instead, I am more group-centric. I want to fit in and be accepted. My identity may be attached to what I do or what groups I belong to.

The third level is the self-authored stage of adult development. Based on multiple theorists, the majority of people hover in the socialized stage with a smaller percentage leaning into self-authoring. Here we see adults moving away from groupthink or identity being assigned by others to a sense of inner purpose and mission. Here, I can hold multiple perspectives that may not have mani-

fested in my earlier stage. I can see various ways of being right, and I am more mature in my world views. In the previous stage, losing my group could bring immeasurable pain. In this self-authored stage of development, living outside my purpose or mission can be excruciating.<sup>3</sup>

These explanations are very brief, but they outline a critical distinction when it comes to voice and silence. When women in leadership are silenced, they can digress into earlier stages of adult development. This digression can be unconscious until it is not. Once awareness occurs that they are outside of their true calling (no longer self-authoring, but socialized, or self-centric), the spiritual isolation can be devastating. When we progress in vertical levels, we never entirely lose the strengths or weaknesses of earlier stages. Theorists call this the subject-object shift.<sup>4</sup>

What I was once subjected to I can now see objectively. It can be a cage-rattling experience to know you have advanced to a self-authoring stage, then experience a silencing phenomenon and feel subjected to issues of belonging that you believe up until recently you could see and manage objectively. When women have crying fits, angry outbursts, or complete shutdowns and later say, "I saw myself in slow motion unraveling, but I felt powerless to shift it," this can be a glimpse into the pain of digression.

My research did not set out to identify the silenced female leader's stages of adult development. There is no multiple-choice assessment that spits out this information. Maturity with stage is assessed based on language alone. The executive women in my study, based on my perception, were in later stages of development. I deemed most as self-authoring based on their words, use of their RV-CARD<sup>2</sup>, metaphors, and worldviews of their leadership. I also could hear them describe distinctions between trying to please others and knowing they were doing it, to wanting to return to their true north and knowing they had lost part of it when silenced.

I firmly believe that voice currency stems from self-authored leaders.

When women in executive roles feel silenced, they digress into previous stages of adult development. When those then try to lead from this socialized stage, they may focus on issues that are too small for the world in which we live. Skills, experience, and expertise are most valued at the socialized level. All good things—but we live in a world with terrorism, school shootings, polarizing political issues, bigotry, and racism. There is not a competency model that will prepare leaders for these types of matters. No college education, certification program, or online tutorial can prepare for the complexity we are dealt.

We need leaders to think bigger and anchor to the values, mission, purpose, and calling of interdependence and broader worldviews. We cannot continue to measure ambiguous dilemmas with black and white thinking or what we believe is a socially constructed perspective of right and wrong. We can believe in certain absolute truths—but we have to be flexible in our views to lead through this wilderness of weird. When women digress into lower levels of maturity to cope with their silencing, they play small, and this leads to more systemic issues of silencing that replicate and foster environments that do not equally value all the voices at the table. The virus spreads too fast in the socialized space, but it can be more fully mitigated when women return to themselves and their higher levels of consciousness.

This leads to an outstanding research discovery about the effectiveness of female leaders.

## **WOMEN ARE MORE EFFECTIVE AT LEADING**

In the previous chapter, I laid out some statistics of women in leadership to create a broader context for men. The more men understand the bigger picture of our reality, the better positioned they are to be good male allies. There is another statistic that skyrockets the need, significance, and necessity for the female leader voice. Her marginalization is reason enough to ensure her

voice is at the table, but there is more. Women rate as more effective leaders than men.

The Leadership Circle Profile (LCP) is a 360-assessment built by Robert J. Anderson after he spent twenty years studying different aspects of adult development, leadership theory, psychology, spiritual development, and organization development. His model and instrument are used worldwide since 2001.<sup>5</sup>

The LCP has over 1.5 million surveys in their database and in a significant research study, Anderson & Adams analyzed hundreds of different data points. One of the more staggering finds, in my opinion, is specific to gender—first a little background on their model and assessment.

Since the contingency theory was published in 1964, scholars have been talking about task versus relationship leaders. Task-motivated leaders are focused on moving work forward and accomplishing goals. Relationship-motivated leaders are concerned with developing interpersonal relationships. The balance of both is essential and most widely used theories today continue to enforce the doctrine that one cannot be emphasized over another. Anderson's model is built on this premise, along with one more. His model also describes the difference between leaders who embody specific creative competencies versus the reactive tendencies that most FHBs commonly use. To survive in this world, we always have to use some measure of passivity, protectiveness, and control. When we have a self-centric or socialized mind-set, our tendencies to be reactive are relatively high.

In summary, Anderson's 360 instrument measures task versus relationship and reactive versus creative leadership. When he began to dissect his million-plus data points, he found that women were only 38 percent of the database, which is no surprise based on our statistics. However, there were more women in the creative space of leadership versus reactive. This suggests that women embrace more of the creative competencies necessary for effective leadership than their male counterparts. From a quantitative perspective, women were 15 to 20 percentile points more creative and less reactive than men.

This seminal work by Anderson is not the only of its kind. There have been other studies showing that when women are board chairs or CEOs in publicly traded companies, the organizations outperform companies led by men up to 25 percent. Now, of course, we are talking a tiny percentage (4 percent), because most companies are run by men. But when women do lead, they do it with far better results. Anderson states, “Women are more effective because they lead more relationally.” He is not suggesting they only lead relationally as a balance between task and relationship is critical for leader success. Instead, he is suggesting their relational abilities tip the scales. Their ability to connect with others, build teams, collaborate, mentor, and develop, along with their interpersonal intelligence (all things that some might call soft stuff), is the secret sauce. Women are scoring higher in these competencies, which correlates to their overall effectiveness in leadership. Female leaders’ rate higher than males.<sup>6</sup>

I think this is a big deal. Women should be at the table for a lot of different reasons. We make up half of all middle management, we are also the most educated, and finally, we get better results when we are in executive roles. I think there is a microphone dropping somewhere.

My female friends, we cannot let the silencing virus continue to keep us leading small. We have to mitigate in ways that make a difference. We must find our fellowship with other leaders and exist in relational community. We must also find ways to sponsor other women and ensure their leadership success. We have to take out our stingers and allow other women to be successful regardless of how hard the journey. We have to notice how our silencing might infect our teams, and we have to ensure our experiences do not nudge us into becoming a silencer of others.

Voice and silence are complex issues that are embedded in organizational systems and to create a new normal, we have to unearth what is hidden and have conversations about what we want to plant instead.





One of my favorite things as a researcher is hearing the stories of women who are on the other side of silencing. I love knowing who or what made a difference and how they are leveraging their voice currency now. It helps me reflect on who made a significant difference in my life.

Mary was the chief nursing officer at the hospital I worked at before I started my private practice. She had a dilemma she was struggling to manage and came to me as the leader in organization development for help. She was clear on what she needed and knew it was something I had energy, skill, and passion for, and it was in my wheelhouse. My team thrived when they were invited in to help with the issue, which was to create a leadership development program for front-line nurse leaders.

We came up with a proposal for her, and then she did what every good executive sponsor needs to do. She approved the work, created the resources to make it happen, made sure the leaders below her supported the initiative; she showed up when I needed her to show up, talked highly about its importance, and then most importantly—she got the hell out of the way!

She let me do what I was good at, and she helped me shine. I then paid it forward and helped my team shine. The recipients of our program were mostly women in supervisory roles and they were allowed to shine.

I still look back on those two years of program oversight as one of the most exciting and rewarding things I have ever done. When I reflect on why it was so valuable for me, I see Mary. I see her refusing to cancel a day of development even when the floors were bursting at the seams with patients, and the supervisors were needed. She declined and protected the time. I see her showing up when I told her to show up, and I hear her supporting the initiative with her words, her voice, her sponsorship. She did not just sponsor the program, she sponsored me. She gave me voice.

Female executives have enormous power to shift systems that silence.



## WOMEN CREATING A NEW NORMAL WITH VOICE AND SILENCE

*I have experienced being silenced, which led to the removal of my thyroid! Now I live a marvelous life beside the corporation that silenced me rather than within the corporation.*

—Previous Seminary Professor

In August 2017, three months before I defended my dissertation, I had the opportunity to present some of my research at an International Coach Federation conference held in Washington, D.C. I responded to the request for proposals earlier that year and received an email from the committee four months later. It read, “We received an overwhelming number of impressive proposals for this event, which made the selection process very difficult. After considering the evaluation feedback and key objectives of the event, I regret to inform you that your proposal has not been selected as an ICF Converge 2017 session.”

*Darn!* I remember feeling defeated, but I deleted the email and went back to writing my dissertation. Twelve days later I received this, “Previously we had notified you that your ICF Converge 2017 proposal was not accepted. We recently had a time slot open up in our schedule, and we were wondering if you would still be interested and available to present your session.” Of course, I

said yes, all the while wondering who backed out for me to get a spot and licking my wounds once more that I did not make the first round.

These conferences are always several days long, and many participants are motivated to attend by the continuing education credits earned to keep their coaching certification active every three years. I was assigned the 4 pm slot on a Friday night on the last full day. I was the only thing keeping attendees from happy hour, and I remember thinking, “This is going to suck!” I was not sure if I would have twenty people show up. I remember telling my dissertation chair my concerns, and she reminded me that as long as one person attended, I could put the presentation on my C.V. Fair enough! I hoped for at least one, but the room held 250 people, so just one would have been beyond embarrassing.

Over two hundred people arrived for that late end of day ninety-minute conference topic on silencing. Let me be clear; they were not there to hear me speak. No one even knew me. They were there because the theme resonated with them. I had a line of people waiting to talk to me after I finished the presentation. I also had dozens of emails from conference attendees, all asking more in-depth questions about female leader silencing. Some of those questions I could answer, many I could not.

My presentation was successful, and I received excellent feedback, but I found it maddening that my initial wave of study could not answer all the different levels of inquiry. I was so motivated, I went back to Fielding Graduate University and applied to be a fellow, which allowed my Institutional Review Board application to conduct research on human subjects stay active. I then conducted another year-long study building off the first to see if I could, with credibility, answer more complex questions.

If the ICF had not come back and offered me a time slot after they had already denied my proposal (*sniff*), I am confident this book would not exist. A few days after I got home from Washington, D.C., I received an email from a woman who was previously a silenced seminary faculty member, who left her career and became a coach. During her silencing experience, her thyroid was

severely impacted. This did not surprise me and her words are in this chapter's epigraph. Instead, her message created an ache in me knowing another talented female leader opted out.

## THE APPEAL OF COACHING AND CONSULTING

I have lost track over the years of how many executive women I have spoken to who have left their industry to start their own practice as a coach or consultant. Most of the reasons are legitimate, and silencing is not a factor in everyone's story. Many times, I learned it was a significant reason.

Adult development is not something attained in a classroom. It is forged through heat and experience. We grow and broaden our perspectives when we face challenging situations that cause us to pause and consider what we have been subject to—it is tough to read the label if you are in the jar. Sometimes we have to get higher on the balcony or even outside the organization before we can make sense of what it means to be effective, self-authored, and have a voice with currency.

Many women, and I surmise men, realize that with a little courage, they can leap into solopreneur work. They can leave behind the systems, silencers, and conditions that allowed them to self-silence or lead from small spaces, playing not to lose. When they finally take stock of their surroundings, their health, voices, lack of relationships, and overall stress levels, many see the costs of staying as far too high.

The exodus of good leaders is beyond what many organizations can tolerate, but instead of addressing the underlying issues, they find a successor who has a newer or higher threshold of tolerance and the cycle begins once again.

For those of us who have chosen to leave organizational leadership permanently, I believe we need to reconsider that decision. As we have left to heal, grow, and learn “beside” the organization that once silenced us, we may have to ask how much more talented, aware, and self-authored we have become since we left. We

might have to consider what type of impact we could have now if we returned.

Not all, but most, leadership and executive coaches were once leaders and executives themselves. They led from those corner offices and dealt with all the complexity that they now use as experienced coaches when they work with clients. Coaching is not a job; it is a vocation, which means “calling.” It is also hard to be a leadership coach and not grow. Most continue to learn and develop with each client they take on. Each conference, certification, or workshop deepens their ability to hold space for a client and partner in ways unavailable when in an organizational leadership role. Their work from the outside helps them see systems and dynamics on the inside differently—they can hold more perspective as a result of their break.

Can you imagine what private industry, government, and non-profit could accomplish if the highly trained coaches and consultants in the world decided to return?

The coaches reading this right now have probably all taken a sharpie to the last few paragraphs. Each time I bring this up to audiences of coaches, there is a collective gasp and a furious shake of the head. No one seems too interested in returning to the places that made success feel so hard.

It is a question that warrants reconsideration. What if becoming a coach or consultant was no longer the end game? What if it was a season to learn, grow, and deepen our voices, awareness, and leadership so we could go back and keep leading? The return would not involve a jump back into the pool of pain, but to go back and create a new sense of normal. What if we could shift systems, facilitate conversations of voice, question the boxes and connecting lines, and ask better questions that elicit new ideas? What if we created a saturated environment of innovative pioneers—women who have previously been silenced but now are thriving with vocation?

As an aside, I wrestle with these same concepts and have for several years. Many argue that intellect, skills, and competencies fade over the years creating too wide of a knowledge gap. People

no longer see themselves qualified to lead in operational areas. We can keep telling ourselves this story if it makes us feel better—I do not buy it. All that stuff will come quickly back.

There will soon be a crisis of too few experienced leaders. The Boomer generation, once the largest population in the workforce, is retiring, and they hold the lion's share of executive roles. My generation, the Xers, have shown a minimal appetite for leadership roles, and we tend to work better as individual practitioners. I, like many, always questioned why meetings were needed and found reasons to avoid them. Generation X only holds a third of the workforce.

The Millennials are rising fast to be the largest population of working people. The millennial generation began in 1981, and most are nearing the years of experience that leads to leadership opportunities. Many reach management positions by the age of thirty, but statistics show that leadership development programs are often not made available until the average age of forty-two. If I do the math, all I see are gaps, gaps, gaps. Perhaps this creates excellent work for those outside of organizations. If you cannot be part of the solution, there is excellent earning potential as long as the problem continues. As these issues continue, though, the systems that silence will not be altered. We need to keep exploring our role in this call to action.

Keep reading!

## **MODEL OF VOICE CURRENCY**

I consider myself an organized mess. I enjoy cleanliness until it gets in the way of creativity. I like things structured until it interferes with my freedom. As previously stated, I'm not a big fan of boxes or straight lines. I don't care if it is an organization chart or a family room television. I prefer things that are at a slight angle. It eases anxiety and accommodates what I believe is the normal untidiness of life. I also think that nothing fits inside a category completely, it may look good on paper, but reality always colors itself

outside the lines and the areas of gray make the constructs of black and white seem near impossible.

Voice and silence are not neat, clear, clean, or organized. Our human abilities to speak and communicate are so unique. They are windows to the soul and through our words and our silence we connect, separate, or confuse. We build relationships, forge un-chartered territory, and make things happen. Our use of language is a profound extension of our existence on this planet, and I do not think there is an elegant way to capture all the complexity of these variables—but we long for one. We long for something simple that can guide how we talk or make sense of how we communicate.

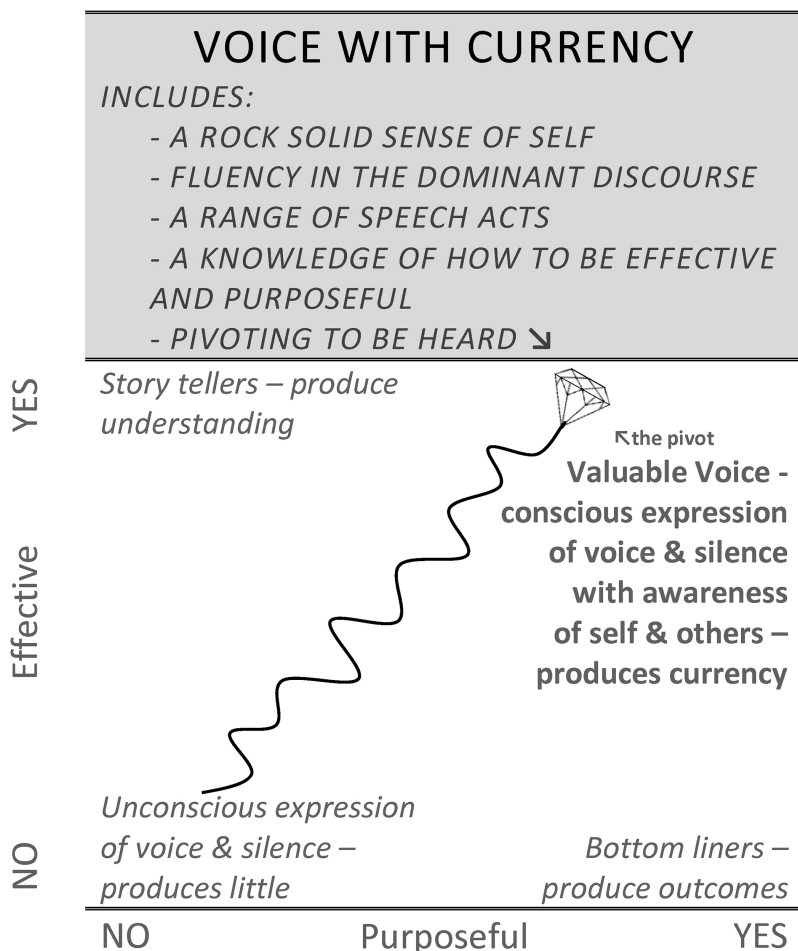
Here is my humble attempt (see figure 13.1).

Language is just utterance without intention. We must be conscious of how we express and how we use silence, or we will never be purposeful, effective, or have a voice with currency. When we camp out too long in our story-centric preferences, we may produce an intended result of understanding, but we may not move people to take action. We just use the RV side of the card with a lot of viewpoints and representative language. In other words, we tell story (after story), and this is not a purposeful way to leverage our language.

On the other hand, we may use very purposeful words, like directives or declarative statements. We can show determination and resolve with our language with a great deal of intention, but we may scorch some relationships in the process as we do not provide enough context behind our motivations, values, or strategies. We have to blend effective story with purposeful statements to have a voice with currency. These polarities shift and combine in ways that do not fall into crisp four-quadrant boxes. Every context, relationship, or interaction may require slight pivots in how we speak.

I spoke about the importance of the preference pivot in chapter 8. To have a voice with currency, we must know our audience, our intention, and we must have skill and ability with the seven sanctifying speech acts. We must always have that RV-CARD<sup>2</sup>





**Figure 13.1. Voice with Currency**

handy and leverage the passive language when needed and then unapologetically use the CARD<sup>2</sup> side to create change with active words.

I believe a diamond with a point serves as a good pivot analogy. Our language is our leadership currency. How we speak is indicative of how we will successfully lead and live in life. We cannot

hang out in the categories we prefer, but be the diamond we are all capable of being with various facets and clarity.

When I was in college, I had one of the best jobs on the planet. I worked at Zales Jewelers! It was a retail job, and I had a sales position. I was paid hourly, but when I sold a diamond ring, a tennis bracelet, or a pair of diamond earrings, I got a two percent commission on the piece. I pushed the diamonds hard. I also learned a lot about the clarity, carat, cut, and color of different diamonds. It was the four Cs that created the value. I think the diamond analogy for voice is powerful because it suggests that I can increase my value in an organization and my effectiveness as a leader when I deepen my voice distinctions. I am never static, but I also do not bend. Like a diamond, I am rock solid with my purpose, values, and mission. I know who I am and do not need to take on a persona that does not align with my real sense of self.

However, this rock—this female leader voice, can pivot!

Her voice will never be perfect, and it may falter with emotion and raise when angry. She may stumble over her words when in a hurry or leave out details in an attempt to paint the big picture. She may provide too much context and need to be reminded to bottom-line it. She may rip her RV-CARD<sup>2</sup> or run on idle too often before punching the gas. She may be a hot mess at times, but her messy leadership voice is far more welcome than her silenced self. Despite all her fallible human ways, her leadership that is an extension of her voice is needed in this untidy, unpredictable place of work and life.

The silenced women in the world need to find community and self-regard so they can untangle the hairball of silencing encounters that have pillaged their souls. Female leaders need to start the journey to recovery with the help of both men and women sponsors, friends, and peers. It is time to frame this phenomenon so that the shame of isolation can fade and the normalcy of the silencing virus symptoms can be acknowledged.

Her vocation never left. She just needs to return to self and claim it. Her faith, spiritual practices, and connection to self are essential to recovery and keeping a voice with currency.

She matters, and we need her back.

## MAKE NO ASSUMPTIONS

In May 2019, I traveled to Los Angeles to speak at a conference hosted by a prestigious law firm that invited in hundreds of their clients for a women's leadership initiative and I was excited. I was perusing my presentation on the flight when the gentleman next to me asked if I was traveling to or leaving home. He then asked if my trip was for business or pleasure. After answering those two questions, he spoke about himself for a while (quite a while actually). He eventually asked me what line of work I was in and when I told him I was headed to a conference to speak, he, of course, asked about the topic.

There are those times when you know—you *just know*. You know it is not going to go well when you answer. This was one of those times.

When he learned I was speaking about female leader silencing, he went on a rant about how he had a female boss in a large organization who sat in a corner office. He shared with me several of her flaws and how she was challenging to work with and then made the mistake of saying something like this, "Women have had no problem promoting where I used to work, and they sure did not have a problem speaking their mind."

I wanted to grab him and shake him like a dog might, but I didn't—I *didn't!*

Instead, I took a deep breath, and because I had just studied some of the statistics in my presentation, I looked him in the eye and told him he was lucky. He happened to work in an industry that despite being primarily female, only has 11 percent in executive positions. I told him he was fortunate to have the opportunity to work with a female executive with a strong and powerful voice.

He did not speak to me for the rest of the flight.

When people start by saying, "women in my organization . . .," I want to stop them right there because this is not just about one

organization, industry, state, or country. My research primarily focused on the female American experience, but I know that women across the globe wrestle with what it means to have a voice. When we dismiss an issue because we do not see it happening in our own neck of the woods, it is no different than the person who says they are not biased or racist because one of their buddies happens to be black. My friends, this is not the way it works.

We have to look beyond the surface to see the context, which includes much more than a present situation. We cannot make assumptions that because your organization is better than others, this is not a problem. We have to assume the conversation specific to voice and silence is one that requires everyone's participation regardless of your personal experience.

## **A FINAL CALL TO ACTION**

If you have read this book cover to cover, thank you! Now give it to someone else to read. With the messy highlights, notes, and dog-eared corners, share the concepts and conversations integrated into these chapters and pages with another woman, man, coach, consultant, or female leader. If you think you are dealing with systems of silencing, a silencer, or a propensity to self-silence, ask yourself what this may mean for you.

Letting go of the past pain associated with silencing is a process. In time, the strong claws that break skin will slowly loosen, and one day you will realize it slipped away and no longer has a tight hold on you. Healing requires patience. For some, it may require partnership with a coach, consultant, mentor, sponsor, or therapist. You would never deny this resource to someone on your team or for a family member, so do not deny it for yourself.

The two most significant factors in healing from silencing were rediscovering regard for self and finding a community of other women. Male allies are also eager to be part of that community and want to be part of the solution—we need to let them. Spend time reflecting on what this means for you.

The act of finding connection is rarely just showing up at a community of practice meeting for executive women, but it is a start. Where is your tribe? Who are your peers? Be willing to look outside your organization, and that means making it a priority on your schedule. Community and kitchen table never happens by accident. Remember, you are worth it—you belong!

When it comes to self-regard, there is no prescription or formula that I will offer up. To be honest, you do not need one. You know what you need. It may be a new wardrobe, a gym membership, regular yoga, a step tracker, a massage, or permission to eat the stinkin' cupcake! Whatever you pursue in this journey to hold yourself in high regard, please know it is not a once-a-year endeavor. A two-week vacation or a once-a-year splurge on a spa day is not going to cut it. Those only make a difference when you practice daily the type of behavior you would readily show someone else you highly regard. Be for yourself what you are so eager to be for others. You deserve it.

From a leadership perspective, sometimes we have to hit the big red reset button and declare a new normal. We may have to get direct and put a stop to the types of language choices we have allowed up until now and encourage everyone to carry their RV-CARD<sup>2</sup> everywhere they go. Often a shared vernacular can be a powerful climate shift within teams or organizations that promotes a collective voice currency.

When you notice queen bee behavior or male dominance that does not fit with your declared new normal, say something. Start and continue to question the climate, systems, or socially constructed dynamics that exist within your organization. The only way to create sustainable change is through conversation and fidelity to your new normal. Encourage the concept of sponsorship in your organization. Explore how sponsoring and managing are separate and let more executives creatively sponsor the leaders emerging and growing below them. It may also require you to find your own sponsor. They will not say yes if you do not ask.

Ultimately, voice recovery is not a simple flip of a switch, and you may need to reexamine all the ways you have overplayed your

voice preferences or attachment to your version of your authentic self. It is crucial to anchor to what you believe is your true essence and vocation, but then be willing to pivot in ways you can be heard based on your audience.

Sometimes this work is hard to do without more professional support. I also would be amiss if I did not remind that there is an essential distinction between coaching, mentoring, therapy, and consulting. The phenomenon of silencing can be approached in every one of these disciplines. When silencing is rooted deep with way too many open wounds and thick scar tissue, therapy may be needed to help with the exploration and healing. I had several participants not just describe their female leader silencing, but they also referenced there was a history of silencing in their family of origin or marriage. This is hard personal work and may require assistance—allow help.

Coaches, consultants, and mentors are all resources that can support you and help figure out the “Now what?” dimension of voice. Sometimes the future cannot be charted without understanding the past. The emphasis with these individuals should be on what you want to create moving forward and how you want to be in the world with voice and silence.

For the leadership coaches who work with a female executive who has experienced the silencing virus, above all else be patient with her. Do not rush her into active language too soon. Let her RV idle for a bit because there is a good chance you will hear a story that no one else has heard. If you ask the right questions about voice and silence, she will piece together her timeline in a far different way. Your partnership and inquiry will allow her to name how silencing has impacted all her domains and her leadership. The naming is critical to frame it, claim it, and then tame it. Do not expect to address healing from silencing in just a couple of coaching sessions. This is complicated and messy work, but critical for those who engage with executive women.



As I bring this book to a close, I feel a sense of closure on this research. It is not an ending as much as it is an honoring of every female leader who has listened to me speak on this topic, emailed me with questions, participated in the research, or allowed me to serve as her executive coach. You are my inspiration.

I have also engaged in deep and meaningful conversations with many male allies who have not only stirred me but reassured me to write this book. You are my Mandolin rain. I remember having an email exchange with a coach colleague named Mark. He offered himself up as a source of encouragement for me as I did this work, and I emailed him asking how I could support him in return. I believe he said the best way I could help him was to “get the damn book written” so he could share it with his clients.

Message received!

With all my voice,  
*Carrie*





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In no particular order, I want to start by thanking Panera Bread. Maybe it's the chicken Fuji apple salad or perhaps it's your triple chocolate cookie with walnuts (which I've heard you've discontinued! What the heck! *Bring'embackBring'emback*). The majority of this book was written on the corner of Holly and Orchard at a table by the east window. I had access to a wall outlet, free Wi-Fi, and control of a window blind. I'm not sure why writing at this location brought me the most success. Sometimes writers just need certain white noise, ambiance, and snacks. Thanks for providing me all the above.

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There are several folks who regularly sit at my metaphorical and literal kitchen table. Evan Roth, Paul Wyman, Beth Ronsick, Tracy Burke, Lynn Ellen Queen, Karen Kahn, Mark House, and Jacquie Fedo, thank you for being part of my leadership coach tribe. Even when I didn't want it, you all made me better by challenging me and holding me accountable. I am blessed to be surrounded by such great colleagues. Thank you for your support and belief in me.

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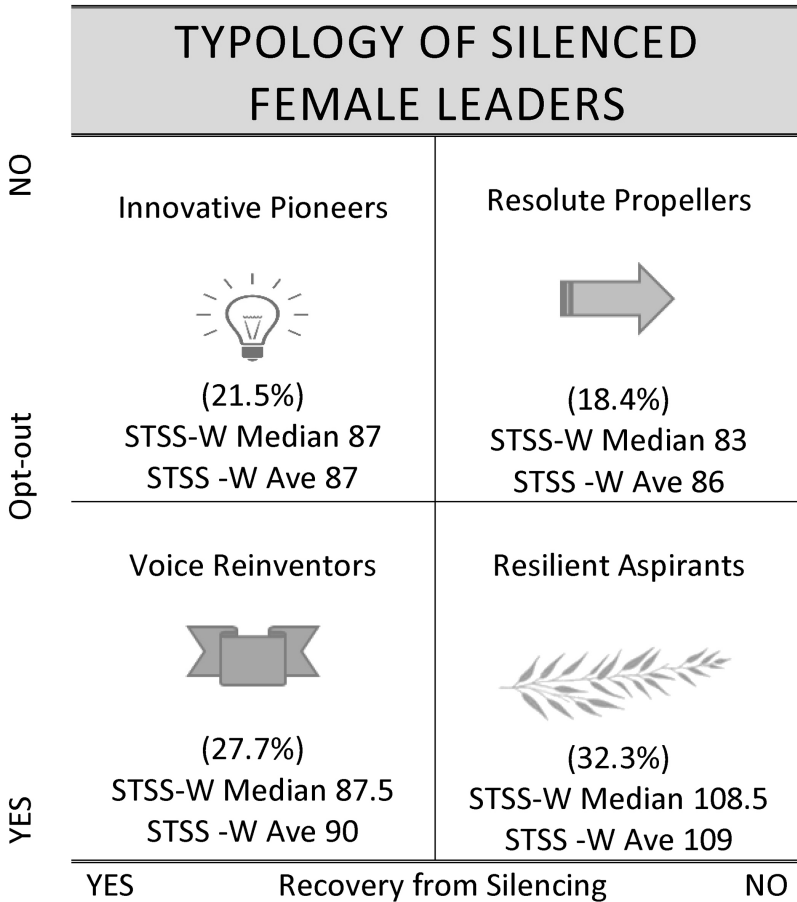
## APPENDIX

**A**n Institutional Review Board (IRB) is an administrative body established to protect the rights and welfare of those recruited to participate in research involving human participants. The study referenced in this book was IRB approved original research conducted by Dr. Carrie Lynn Arnold. The participant names are changed to protect the confidentiality of those who agreed to be studied. These pages profile the participant demographics along with their quantitative results from the Silence the Self Scale–Work (STSS-W). The four-quadrant typology is a research discovery based on the participant data.

\* Composite STSS-W scores range from 31–155.

\*\* Resilient Aspirants are female leaders who have left a position that silenced them, but have not fully recovered from that silencing experience. They are potentially leading or consulting/coaching as a silenced woman. Their STSS-W scores are higher than the other types, indicating a greater level of self-silencing. This group of women represents the majority of study participants; leaving a position in itself does not bring voice recovery.

The higher the STSS-W scores, the greater chance a female leader will not fully recover from her silencing (with or without an opt-out). The chi-square statistic is 6.2745. The  $p$  value is .012249. This result is significant at  $p < .05$ . The chi-square statistic with



**Figure A.1. Typology of Silenced Female Leaders**

Yates correction is 5.0824. The *p* value is .024171. Significant at *p* < .05.

The higher the STSS-W scores, the greater chance a female leader will opt out of leadership or transition into another role. The chi-square statistic is 4.5613. The *p* value is .032701. This result is significant at *p* < .05. The chi-square statistic with Yates correction is 3.5371. The *p* value is .06001. Significant at *p* < .10.

DEMOGRAPHICS	
<p>Participant Industry Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STEM/Technology (35%)</li> <li>• Professional Services/finance/legal (18%)</li> <li>• Military/Government/Nonprofit (17%)</li> <li>• Education (14%)</li> <li>• Healthcare (11%)</li> <li>• Misc. (Construction /Restaurant) (5%)</li> </ul>	<p>Participant Income level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under \$75,000 (6%)</li> <li>• \$75,000 - \$99,999 (11%)</li> <li>• \$100,000 - \$124,999 (22%)</li> <li>• \$125,000 - \$149,999 (14%)</li> <li>• \$150,000 - \$174,999 (12%)</li> <li>• \$175,000 - \$199,999 (6%)</li> <li>• \$200,000 and up (29%)</li> </ul>
<p>Participant Nationality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asian (3%)</li> <li>• Black or African American (11%)</li> <li>• Hispanic or Latino (4.5%)</li> <li>• White (80%)</li> <li>• Other (1.5%)</li> </ul>	<p>Participant Position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owner / President / CEO (20%)</li> <li>• Vice President (35%)</li> <li>• Senior Director (14%)</li> <li>• Director (28%)</li> <li>• Other (3%)</li> </ul>
<p>Participant Age</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 to 39 – (17%)</li> <li>• 40 to 49 – (26%)</li> <li>• 50 to 59 – (43%)</li> <li>• 60 to 69 – (14%)</li> </ul>	<p>Participant Education level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some College (3%)</li> <li>• Bachelor’s Degree (22%)</li> <li>• Graduate Degrees (Masters or Doctorate) (75%)</li> </ul>

**Figure A.2. Demographics**





# NOTES

## I. HOW SILENCE IS A HIATUS OR A SCREAM

1. Richard L. Johannesen, "The Functions of Silence: A Plea for Communication Research," *Western Journal of Communication*, 38, no. 1, (1974): 25–35.
2. Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989).
3. Laura Whitworth, *Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People toward Success in Work and Life*, second ed. (Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Pub., 2007).
4. The Enneagram can be seen as a set of nine distinct personality types, with each number on the Enneagram denoting one type. It is common to find a little of yourself in all nine types, although one of them should stand out as being closest to yourself. "The Peacemaker Enneagram Type 9," *Enneagram Institute*, Accessed March 2, 2018 from: <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/type-9/>.
5. Paul Schrodtt, PhD, professor of communication studies, conducted a meta-analysis involving more than 14,000 participants. His findings revealed the silent treatment is tremendously damaging. It decreases relationship satisfaction for both partners, diminishes feelings of intimacy, and reduces the capacity to communicate in a way that's healthy and meaningful. Paul Schrodtt, Paul L. Witt, and Jenna R. Shimkowski, "A Meta-Analytical Review of the Demand/Withdraw Pattern of

Interaction and its Associations with Individual, Relational, and Communicative Outcomes,” *Communication Monographs* 81, no. 1 (2014): 28–58.

6. “The Facts Behind the #metoo Movement,” retrieved February 1, 2018 from <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Full-Report-2018-National-Study-on-Sexual-Harassment-and-Assault.pdf>. GfK conducted the 2,000-person survey online using the Knowledge Panel, the largest probability based online panel that is representative of the general population. Stop Street Harassment (SSH) commissioned this study. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines sexual violence as “a sexual act that is committed or attempted by another person without freely given consent of the victim or against someone who is unable to consent or refuse.” This is inclusive of forced sex acts, as well as unwanted non-penetrative sexual contact, or non-contact unwanted sexual experiences.

## 2. WHO IS SHE?

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3. There are powerful forces in many organizations that cause widespread withholding of information about potential problems or issues by employees named as organizational silence. The base of the model is from Morrison & Milliken. Organizational silence is a collective phenomenon that includes (1) Top management team characteristics, (2) Organizational and environmental characteristics, (3) Affecting employee interaction, (4) Managerial belief, (5) Organizational structures and policies, (6) Managements’ fear of negative feedback, and (7) Demographic dissimilarity. Ghodrattollah Bagheri, Reihaneh Zarei, and Mojtaba Nik Aeen, “Organizational Silence: Basic Concepts and Its Development Factors,” In *Ideal Type of Management* 1, no. 1 (2012): 47–58.

4. Helmut R. Wagner, *Phenomenology of Consciousness and Sociology of the Life-World: An Introductory Study* (Edmonton, Alta., Canada: University of Alberta Press, 1983).

### 3. FEELING SILENCED CAN MAKE YOU SICK!

1. The *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* is an interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal published semi-monthly. It covers environmental sciences and engineering, public health, environmental health, occupational hygiene, health economic and global health research, stress and health. The Special Issue: "Stress and Health," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2018, was retrieved April 22, 2018 from: [http://www.mdpi.com/journal/ijerph/special\\_issues/stress#info](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/ijerph/special_issues/stress#info).

2. A person's hard-wired stress response is designed to give them the quick burst of heightened alertness and energy needed to perform at best. But stress isn't all good. When activated too long or too often, stress can damage virtually every part of the body. Sharon H. Bergquist looks at what goes on inside the body when chronically stressed. "How Stress Affects Your Body—Sharon Horesh Bergquist" YouTube video, 4:42, posted by Ted-Ed, October 22, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-t1Z5-oPtU>.

3. Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004): p. 44.

### 4. RELATIONSHIPS THAT SILENCE

1. According to 2017 data, 56,490 women (51.27 percent), 53,645 men (48.69 percent), and 49 people who identified as "other" (0.04 percent) were enrolled in law school. Staci Zaretsky, "There Are Now More Women in Law School Than Ever Before: How Many Women are Enrolled at the Best Law Schools in the Nation," *Above the Law*, March 7, 2018, <https://abovethelaw.com/2018/03/there-are-now-more-women-in-law-school-than-ever-before/>.

2. Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone* (New York: Random House, 2017).

3. Women who are successful in male-dominated environments with positions of high status may be more likely to endorse gender stereotypes. They tend to view women they supervise as competitors and possess negative attitudes toward them. Graham Staines, Carol Tavis, and Toby E. Jayaratn, "The Queen Bee Syndrome," *Psychology Today* 7, no. 8 (1974): 55.

4. "Shine Theory" is a term coined by Aminatou Sow and Ann Friedman. They have been practicing it privately since 2010 and speaking about it publicly since 2013. Ann Friedman, Shine Theory (website), retrieved June 3, 2018 from: <https://www.annfriedman.com/shine-theory/>.

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6. David Rock and Linda J. Page, *Coaching with the Brain in Mind: Foundations for Practice* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

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4. Daniel C. McCallum, "Superintendent's Report," *Classics of Organization Theory* (1856): 42–43.

## 6. WHEN WOMEN SILENCE THEMSELVES

1. Robin Patric Clair, *Organizing Silence: A World of Possibilities* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

2. Charles Courtenay, *The Empire of Silence* (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1916): 137. “There were lesser figures in their thousands, of whom history takes no count, who were silenced in the same blistering way. They ventured to think for themselves, according to the Word of God, and further dared to declare it openly, and the faggot and the stake did their tragic work in reducing them to eternal silence. It was the last and most telling argument that a darkened church could use, and it used it to the bitter end.” [Faggot is a bundle of sticks or twigs bound together as fuel.]

3. “Walton-On-Thames (Scold’s Bridle),” What to See in England by Gordon Home, retrieved May 4, 2019 from: <http://www.authorama.com/what-to-see-in-england-3.html>.

4. Charles Courtenay, *The Empire of Silence* (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1916): 185. Courtenay captured the thoughts of men in his era in the chapter Prime Offenders. He quotes Dr. John Brown, “Pray do not ask me to be civil to a loquacious woman. I like a woman to speak, and to speak a great deal; nothing except sleep becomes her better. But a talking woman is an awful judgment, and a mystery, and an oppression.”

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11. Fiona Landers, “We Have Always Silenced Women,” *Dame*, October 24, 2017. <https://www.damemagazine.com/2017/10/24/we-have-always-silenced-women/>.

12. Dana Crowley Jack, *Silencing the Self: Women and Depression*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

13. Linda Vaden Gratch, *Workplace Self-Silencing: Exploring the Effects of Tenure on Individual’s Tendencies Toward Silence*, Unpublished manuscript, Houston, TX: University of Houston–Downtown, 1995.

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15. Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004): 44.

## 7. HOW VOICE IS A SCREECH OR A SANCTIFICATION

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2. Tom Rath, *Strengthsfinder 2.0*, New York: Gallup Press, 2007.

3. "Elizabeth Holmes, Theranos CEO at TEDMED 2014," YouTube video, 2:04, posted by MedCity News, September 12, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ho8geEtCYjw>.

4. *(In)Visible Women*, hosted by Corynne Corbett & Kim D'Abreu is available as a podcast. Retrieved from: <https://visiblewomenpodcast.com/>, the *(In)Visible Women Podcast*, puts issues related to diversity, inclusion, and appearance in the spotlight and examines how they impact the lives of women of color.

5. Chad T. Brinsfield, Jerald Greenberg, and Marissa S. Edwards, eds., "Voice and Silence in Organizations: Historical Review and Current Conceptualizations," in the *Voice and Silence in Organizations*, edited by Marissa S. Edwards and Jerald Greenberg, 3–36 (UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2009).

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7. Anne M. Koenig, Alice H. Eagly, Abigail A. Mitchell, and Tiina Ristikari, "Are Leader Stereotypes Masculine? A Meta-Analysis of Three Research Paradigms," *Psychological Bulletin* 137, no. 4 (2011): 616.

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## 10. CARING FOR SELF

1. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1996).

2. Anne Kreamer, *It's Always Personal: Navigating Emotion in the New Workplace* (New York: Random House Incorporated, 2013).

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## 11. THE IMPORTANT ROLE MEN PLAY

1. “Workplaces that Work for Women,” *Catalyst*, Accessed December 7, 2018 from: <https://www.catalyst.org/>. They partner with 800+ organizations to help make a positive change. Their action-oriented research focuses on three areas: accelerating women at work by building inclusive cultures, addressing workplace issues at the intersection of gender, race, and ethnicity, and engaging men as champions to help women advance and succeed.

2. “What Lies Behind Gender Pay Gaps,” *Global Wage Report (2018/19)*, retrieved from: [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_650553/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_650553/lang--en/index.htm). If all current variables remain unchanged, the gender pay gap may not close until the year 2070.

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