

## **An Invitation to Develop Your Voice**

The lives and relationships of women are formed by a group of people and communities, which develop a shared understanding of knowledge, messages, and norms. Each individual is taught to follow these messages, and she internalizes these norms from families, schools, media and cultural beliefs. For instance, ideas around “right” partner, “good” parents, “ideal” body, “perfect” person and so on. As one is growing up, she measures her abilities and strengths with social standards. If she finds that she does not quite fit with the norm, she develops critical voices in her head. These critical voices give an individual stress because she has not fulfilled required expectations. These critical voices are constituted in one’s mind and keep reminding an individual to “keep up”. Critical voices exist where comparison and evaluation are possible as well as when an individual feels vulnerable. Critical voices can be used as a basis for comparison against oneself and others. As a result, women’s lives and relationships can be haunted by critical voices/ thoughts which force us to position self and others as “less than” or “better than”. Critical voices may get us to worry about misinterpretation of our intentions, thoughts, and behaviors by others. It may get us to put ourselves down, to believe that others are much more skilled or clever and to feel insecure or jealous. Critical voices get us to criticize one another, to remember each other’s flaws and mistakes, to make assumptions about others’ behaviors and to check our own assumptions less and less. Critical voices get us to be intolerant of differences and close our mind to finding alternative creative ways of being. Critical voices invite us to negativity and avoidance and they minimize our capacity for growth and change.

Developing your own voice is a compelling journey in life. Critical voices are embedded in our minds as they convince us that they are the only truth about others and ourselves. There are several ways to silence these critical voices:

- Recognize self-critical and socially critical messages.
- Identify voices that don’t originate from you (they are the product of messages from others)
- Counteract critical voices/thoughts: write out all the critical messages you hear inside your head. Try to figure out who said it first, where critical voices come from, and how you learned about it. Write out a response that counteracts these messages
- Make a list of the things you like about yourself.

Questioning the existence of critical voices is the best route to developing your own voice. Happy possibilities!

If you would like to work with me to address the critical voices, which are keeping you from moving forward in your life, please give me a call.

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Fall 2003 newsletter