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## **The DISTORTED LENS of Victoria's Voicelessness**

**DISTORTION:** *"I **must** not be the source of conflict, but **must** maintain peace, be seen, not heard. I **must** always be good, polite, politically-correct. I **must** always reflect graciousness."*

Although Victoria is now an adult, she can recall the diatribes that her mother unleashed on her and her father when she was a child. Victoria remembers with clarity:

I watched mom throw dishes attempting to smash things on my dad's head, she screamed unmercifully at him. She would take the clothes out of his dresser drawers and dump them outside the back door. As a little girl, I tried to stop the mania, and she turned on me. She would threaten me, "If you think you can be your dad's attorney, I will show you how much worse it can get, you dirty, little rotten, son of a bitch. You shut the hell up, or I will give you something to be sorry for."

Saving my money, going to church, taking care of my mother in her various stages of illness, she still treated me as if I were a child. I could never share with anyone that she was abusive. I would not tell my dad how I felt as he already carried a heavy burden. My half-brothers and half-sister did not understand as they lived with other family members and envied my life, having a mother and father to raise me.

Having always been a child with adult responsibility; I was the "adult-child," and not allowed to grow up emotionally, only responsibly. The emotional abuse was relentless. Being an obedient daughter, I tried hard to gain my mother's approval through attempting to live perfectly to her standards, pretending to "like" it and keeping my mouth shut. (Pretending was a vital part of the mother-demand. That is where my false-self developed.) I never measured up to her unrealistic standards. She was harder to please than God. At that time, I did not know, although not diagnosed to my knowledge, that she had a personality disorder. She was taking a lot of pills that whacked her out. Now it is evident to me she had a chemical imbalance which caused the mania in our home.

There was an internal conflict that riddled me; I never felt authentic as it was demanded of me to pretend all was well when it was not. If I spoke the truth about what I felt, it caused her feel guilty, which she could not bear. She needed to control what I thought and said so. This is the way she could feel good about herself. When I spoke up, it challenged her irrational words and behavior. She could not deal with it. It was a double-bind for me, my reality was not true, only hers.

During those days I prayed and prayed for God's deliverance, yet my mother would use scripture to control me even more. She would badger me with, 'Honor your father and mother' as if I were not. I had read the rest of that passage in the Bible about parents not provoking your children to discouragement rather nurture them. But I dared not speak the truth of the scripture to her; it was a one-way lesson. I was not permitted to "have a voice." It was a mantra in our home, 'Little girls are seen and not heard, so shut the hell up.'

## **INSIGHT FOR REFLECTION:**

Similar to the Lens of Powerlessness, the nuance with this lens is that Victoria cannot express her voice without fear of punishment. "I cannot cause conflict. I must keep the peace. Isn't that what God wants, for me to be a peacekeeper? I must always be good, polite, politically-correct, gracious." Like other lenses, the prescription for this one is typically written in childhood when the individual is tasked with the responsibility of keeping the peace, to be seen, not heard. These children learn to stay invisible – without voice or opinion. Voiceless women have inwardly determined to be master chameleons.

Opinions are not expressed, even in the case of abuse, honesty is exchanged for the illusion, "all is well." A woman who utilizes this lens masks pieces of her personality, all the while losing a sense of self. Having never been permitted to explore and express who she is, her thoughts and feelings, she abides by the mistaken belief she must hide her true self to be loved. Seeking connection where she can perceive unconditional love and acceptance often leads to pursuing unhealthy environments in adulthood. These lens-wearing ladies can be cult-prone.

However, a Voiceless Woman trying to find her voice without loving support, guidance and honest feedback from a close confidante risks alienating others. It can be discouraging for a woman trying to "find voice" when she begins to practice using it. When this woman starts to "find voice," sometimes she will overcompensate and become loud and brash being fed up with no one listening or paying attention. Operating in extremes may occur. Because coming from a family of origin where Victoria felt invisible by not being heard, she communicated to her husband by explaining something to him at a high-level of intensity, so he will understand and respond at a moderate level. This pattern is a carryover from her childhood, as her mother would not and could not hear her unless she spoke with extreme emotion to gain any level of response. Because Victoria was used to an explosive response, when her husband provided a normal response, Victoria did not feel heard.

If the Voiceless Woman is not aware of how her voice is perceived by others as she can sound like she is "issuing orders" to her family when in essence she is only trying to communicate what she is thinking. When a woman perceives she has not been heard by her spouse, she can begin to sound like a nag, but in reality, she is crying out for help and understanding. The exiled little girl inside the woman's body wants loving nurture, and that is her subconscious way of asking for it. Rather than compelling her husband, though, she inadvertently turns him to stone.

Women who have not been "heard" most of their lives long to be understood. Being misunderstood is extremely lonely for this particular woman and can become a self-perpetuating cycle unless she comes to realize how she is innocently sabotaging the very relationships that she craves. Voiceless women are very adept at meeting others' needs and wants at their own expense. Most of the time voiceless women are not cognizant of their own "needs and wants" since they have been very accustomed to listening to and taking care of others' needs. Because they have been verbally shut down, the belief no one cares about them has been reinforced. Due to this distortion, they have difficulty even listening to their own internal depth of neediness.

## **REFLECTIONS for DISCUSSION**

Do you think that Victoria was aware of the way her husband heard her voice?

Do the circumstances in Victoria's childhood justify how she goes to extreme communication in her own life?

Explain the difference between understanding and justifying.

How might this impact other relationships in Victoria's life?

What is a double-bind?

How can those who wish to be perfect end up sabotaging their relationships?

What is the difference between peacekeeping and peacemaking?

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