

HELLO
MY NAME IS

THE PROBLEM THAT HAS NO NAME

by Michelle Kelley, LCSW

It is invisible. It is intangible. It has no name.

It is a problem when:

- A woman's confidence is undermined or missing.
- A woman receives mixed messages about her identity.
- A woman has denied her own intuition for so long that she no longer recognizes it.
- A woman does not have appropriate boundaries in her relationships.

The phrase “the problem that has no name” was coined by Betty Friedan, U.S. feminist. She was referring to the fact that women were being kept from growing into their full potential during a time when women were primarily homemakers. Ms. Friedan wrote about a strange stirring in women, a sense of dissatisfaction, and a yearning for something more. Her book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) discussed the problem with no name.

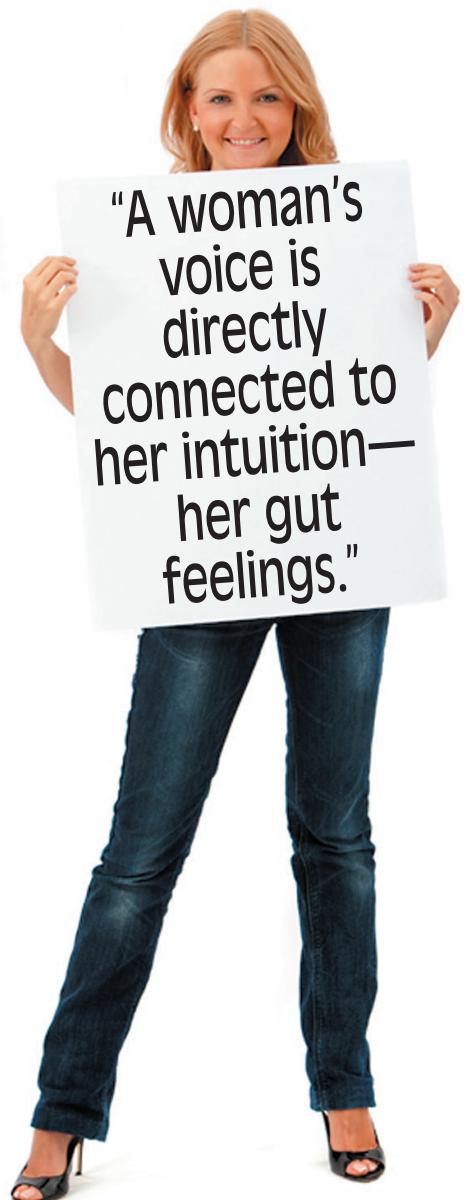
This strange stirring was connected to a woman being gender stereotyped and feeling her only option was to be a housewife and homemaker.

Today women certainly have more options and choices but nevertheless the strange stirring remains.

Since the early 1960s gender roles have changed significantly for women. Even though women comprise at least 50% of the work force—they are still faced with the weight of caring for the family's emotional and physical needs.

A 2012 survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that although women have gained professional ground, they still take on more housework duties and have more childcare responsibilities than their male counterparts. Women are overwhelmed by the seemingly impossible work-life balance. Some say women have it all and should be grateful—after all there are women in other countries who have it much worse. The strange stirring still exists.

This “Problem With No Name” is buried deep inside many women. Often it takes the form of depression or anxiety. At the very least it is misdiagnosed and certainly misunderstood. Historically, a woman's sadness, stirring, anger, and confusion have been explained away by professionals, both men and women. Possibly a woman's issues are all in her head, simply made up. Possibly they are related to her menstrual cycle or not



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having enough sex. Some believe that perhaps the cure is just more—more sex, more money, more mediation, etc.

This stirring in women is directly connected to:

- A lack of confidence
- Feeling disempowered
- Feeling invisible
- Damaged self-image

The woman experiencing this “stirring” is quietly screaming in her relationships. She yearns to be emotionally strong. She craves boundaries in her relationships in a world that believes women really shouldn’t have or need boundaries.

Women are desperately seeking understanding and validation.

- Where can they turn?
- Who do they talk to?
- Who will understand?
- Does anyone really care?

As a counselor I have seen many women who have tried unsuccessfully to deny or silence their voice. Some end up in counseling. Some end up divorced. Some end up staying in dysfunctional or abusive relationships. Some hurt quietly. Others hurt loudly.

A woman’s voice is directly connected to her intuition—her gut feelings.

For many women this intuition has been stamped out of existence. A woman knows when she has been mistreated on any level. For example, a woman is told by her husband that his inappropriate texting/email relationship with a particular female is nothing to worry about and she is obviously blowing the situation out

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of proportion. Deep down inside a woman knows that this is wrong and that his behavior is hurtful and that his ability to deny is confusing at the very least.

Over time if a woman denies her voice or someone else denies it for her—her voice will cease to exist. This is the problem that has no name. How do you solve a problem that has no name? The possible solutions include:

- Know your feelings
- Believe your feelings
- Own your feelings
- Validate your feelings
- Communicate your feelings
- Find and claim your voice

Someone recently asked me how I came to claim my voice. My answer—it is a long story and it was a long journey. I believe it is a

critical journey that women need to take. Claiming your voice is a key component to your happier, healthier future. I can trace the roots of my passion and the creation of my voice back to my grandmothers. Now I use my voice to serve as a role model and teach girls and women how to use theirs.

Perhaps 2013 will be the year that women start making necessary gains in finding and claiming their voices. If not—then women will continue to live unhappily with a serious problem that has no name.

Suggested Readings:

- *A Woman’s Worth* by Marianne Williamson
- *Empowering Women: Every Woman’s Guide to Successful Living* by Louise Hay

Michelle Kelley, LCSW, is a licensed counselor and the owner of Girls Stand Strong in Warrenton. Michelle helps pre-teen and teenage girls, as well as adult women, develop the self-confidence and self-esteem they need to achieve their goals and realize their dreams. Through her speaking engagements, classes and workshops, and counseling—Michelle provides girls and women with the essential tools to select and cultivate healthy friendships and relationships. Such positive relationships foster a strong emotional well-being and successful social lives. Please visit www.GirlsStandStrong.com or call 703.505.2413 for additional information.

