

Growing up a tomboy in rural Wyoming, I have always worked in male-dominated fields. I was a whitewater, rock climbing, and mountaineering guide by age 21. I became the administrative director of an outdoor school at 23, and concurrently serve as a Christian minister and as the COO/CFO of an engineering firm at 34. In order to navigate work-place dynamics of these male-dominated fields, I have had to hone my social skills and body language. I sit in a lower chair, intentionally maintain postures of a relaxed and open nature, and try not to use a better vocabulary than the individual to whom I am speaking. I endure secretarial duties and event planning as an administrator because one can't fight every battle. I have had to find many ways around labels. I have lost wages, jobs, and relationships due to those stereotypes. Somehow along the way of trying to be a more effective executive I became ashamed that I am a powerful, intelligent, and attractive woman.

Last month I was invited to participate in an education task force to develop national recommendations on continuing education for pastors. Previously unknown to the other task force members and new to the Christian denomination, I was extremely nervous due to past negative experiences. I rarely allow myself to shine in front of others and I have never brought my full personality to bear in front of new people. A week before this task-force meeting I decided I would hide no longer. I was going to spread my wings and fully shine. I would no longer let the voices in my head cause me to slump in my posture, reduce my vocabulary, or hide my brilliance. I would be vulnerable without being weak, strong without being masculine and powerful without being overbearing. I decided I would be proud and not apologetic that this personality came in a female package. I would be beautifully feminine and beautifully brilliant, leaving the workarounds to others in the room.

I went to the meeting and I was finally all of who I wanted to be. I was fully myself for probably the first time in my life. It was amazing. The meetings went very well; I presented new ideas and blew them away. But more than that, I faced my own insecurities and did it for myself. It was not easy, but I believe it will get easier with practice. I am learning to be comfortable in my own skin. I only lose power when I give it away, so I can be bold for what I believe. Thank you for giving me the chance to share my story.