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Women's Studies

The Courage Code: It's Yours. Break It. Own It. Use It.
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Think of a self-determined woman and Oprah Winfrey might come to mind; a courageous woman, Rosa Parks; a powerful woman, Hillary Rodham Clinton. Chances are you would not think of the woman next door, the owner of the local coffee shop, or your son's fifth-grade teacher.

And yet, it is entirely likely that, unbeknownst to the world at large, each of those "ordinary" women has been, in her own way, just as self-determined and courageous, and exhibited just as much power as society's more notable icons. What is even more likely, however, is that these characteristics go unnoticed by the women themselves.

Such a conundrum got the authors thinking. "Why," they asked, "if women were indeed changing the world, every day, routinely, in large and small ways, did they not recognize and celebrate their self-determination, power, and courage?"

Part of the reason for this perceptive disconnect, they discovered, comes from the accepted feminine definition of those terms. Witness the icons cited above. These are women who are larger than life, whose awe-inducing accomplishments have, quite literally, made the world a better place. Against such standards, all else pales in comparison.

How, then, to shift the paradigm so that *every* woman, famous or not, can discover her hidden strengths and make changes in her life that, while they may or may not affect the entire universe, can greatly impact her own corner of the world? The answer can be found within the compellingly honest stories of forty-four women spanning all ages, ethnicities, and educational, professional, and economic backgrounds who have experienced an epiphany and, as a result, are now leading what the authors refer to as "authentic" lives.

Following established careers as professional counselors, administrators, and trainers, the authors launched True North Experiences, a company that provides self-help resources for

women, and became the founders and executive directors of The Courage Project. Such experience enabled them to develop their project's three guiding principles—Choosing Self, Redefining Power, and Expressing Courage—concepts powerfully illustrated by their subjects' personal narratives. Told in her own words, each remarkable—if unremarked upon—woman relates with disarming candor the inspiring circumstances of how she overcame abuse, poverty, physical limitations, or other obstacles to redefine her life. Among the kernels of hard-won wisdom and heartfelt gratitude, there are lessons to be found within each confession.

Their names are not Oprah, Rosa, and Hillary, but Chava, Lisa, and Melanie, and their stories offer a stimulating, revelatory appreciation of women from all walks of life who exemplify determination, courage, and power on the most basic, but also the most uplifting, levels.

Carol Haggas