

Eight Steps to Becoming You

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Laurie Marsden has created an eight-step program to help empower women.

By Emily J. Weitz

Laurie Marsden came to her work in empowering women from an industry where women are historically unsupported.

“I was in the fashion industry for a long time,” she says, “and when I got out of that I wanted to do something very different with my life. I wanted to do something to help women.” She went back to university to study psychology, psychotherapy, and social work. “I was particularly interested in the issues of self esteem and identity,” she says.

During her time in graduate school, Marsden worked with women in a variety of capacities, from a clinic in Harlem to in-patient psychiatry. “I worked with women in all these different kinds of situations,” she says, “in a deep and significant way.”

Marsden often ran support groups as well as working one-on-one with women, and she started to notice patterns. She started to see issues that come up for all women, regardless of social status or other factors. “I found that no matter where these women were from,” she explains, “they shared these common core issues.”

That was the birth of the 8 Steps to Becoming You. Through clinical research and observation, Marsden identified eight core issues that women need to address in their quest to be happy and fulfilled. They are: Self Awareness and Identity, Thoughts and Feelings, Communication and Assertiveness, Relationships and Boundaries, Getting through Tough Times, Sexuality and Body Image, Health and Relaxation, and Appearance and Grooming.

Sag Harbor ^{The} Express.

"It was a grassroots evolution from what women came and presented with," says Marsden. "It came from group work, then seminars."

Marsden found that her seminars were very successful, but also that women had a difficult time carving out the space in their lives for a weekend devoted to their own wellness. So she decided to take the program online. Now, the entire program can be accessed online. She developed a 95 page workbook with worksheets and topics for discussion. She created 46 videos that bring the seminars to life. And she formed a community board where women can interact with each other and with her to discuss issues as they come up through the course of the program.

"Women juggle so many roles," says Marsden. "We are too busy with all these other commitments. So I wanted to offer women a program they could do online, in the privacy of their own home, any time they want. The program is six to eight hours depending on how much time they put into it."

Marsden used to have a more typical psychotherapy practice in New York, where she would meet people in a one-on-one session and address their issues. But the 8 Steps to Becoming You has been a long time in the making.

"This program has been developing since I was an intern at Columbia in 1998," she says. About a year and a half ago, she led a seminar at Joshua's Place in Southampton and found it very well received. After that, she decided to take the program online.

"We're in the launch phase," she says. "It's hard to say the current demographic, but I am looking for a wide reach."

That is one of the driving factors behind Marsden's idea of taking this program to the larger stage of the internet. "I am able to reach a wide variety of women," she says. "If I can help more women, that is appealing to me."

This web-based intervention is a new development in the world of psychotherapy. "I find it exciting," says Marsden. "It appeals to the modern woman. The idea is not to wait until you're clinically depressed, but to get yourself into a better frame of mind in a self-help kind of way. It is essentially a wellness program."

Women, who are typically the nurturers, often have a hard time accepting this kind of help, says Marsden. "We give and give without taking care of ourselves," she says. "We put ourselves at the end. That's a big thing women come to me with. It is so important to care for the caregiver. If you don't take care of yourself, you can't take care of anyone else, and if you put it in that context, that's when women will allow themselves to do a program like this."

To check out the 8 Steps to Becoming You at Marsden's web site, www.lauriemarsden.com.