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Boston University School of Theology

ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER

Volume 41 Issue 2 Spring 2024

WOMEN & CONFIDENCE



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“AM I ENOUGH?” WOMEN IN THE WORLD 2024

Women’s self-confidence has been a hidden but real struggle for many women leaders. Even though self-confidence is a characteristic that leaders must have, women leaders have faced many challenges nurturing self-confidence within and beyond US society. As the Anna Howard Shaw Center has conducted many research projects focused on religious women’s leadership for the last ten years, self-confidence also has come up as one of the most troubling and complicated issues about which religious women leaders suffer. “Am I enough?” “Am I enough as a pastor?” “Am I enough as a mother?” “Am I enough as a leader?” “Am I enough in this society?” “Am I enough in the eyes of God?” Women have asked this question many times in their lives and tried to find an answer. Taking the first step of defining women’s self-confidence and the practices used to develop it, the Anna Howard Shaw Center started with this question and searched for some answers in our annual Women in the World Conference on April 10th, 2024.

This year’s theme of “Am I Enough?” invited speakers and participants alike to consider this question by applying it both to their personal lives and the systemic issues women in leadership encounter. Dr. Elise Ji Young Choe, an academic researcher and staff psychologist at the Danielson Institute, gave the first presentation titled “Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don’t: The Double-Edged Sword of Virtues and Humility.” This presentation invited attendees to engage the nuance of virtues, such as humility, recognizing both their potential benefits and their “dark sides.” Choe examined positive effects of humility from a psychological perspective while simultaneously challenging the valorization of this and other virtues, which have often been disproportionality associated with women and used as a metric for their behavior. Reflecting on research which indicates female leaders are perceived more harshly than male leaders and that this is exacerbated for women of intersecting marginalized identities, Choe



Dr. Elise Ji Young Choe
“Damned if You Do,
Damned if You Don’t”

offered a few options for navigating virtues, which included redefining humility and other virtues, creating community, reembracing pride as accurate self-view, and radical wisdom. Regarding radical wisdom based in the work of Womanist ethicist Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Choe said, “Because we experienced oppression in the systems, we have the unique knowledge of how to undermine them... and so we can.” She also proposed utilizing the tools of expanding one’s horizon and understanding that everything is contextual: “What we considered virtues before in one context are not necessarily the same as they are now... Not all virtues are good and not all vices are bad. Everything is in balance and moderation.”

Deborah J. Hamilton, a chaplain, registered nurse, and veteran captain of the United States Army Nurse Corps, gave a narrative talk on the “Journey from Nurse to Nurse Chaplain.” Speaking out of her extensive experience in medical and military professional environments, Hamilton shed light on the joys and empowerment of embracing her vocational callings, but she also called attention to the challenges women, people of color, and

Deborah J. Hamilton
“The Journey from Nurse
to Nurse Chaplain”



“AM I ENOUGH?” WOMEN IN THE WORLD 2024



Cynthia N. Perry, Rev. Philomena Hare, and Rev. Kristen Hydinger (left to right)

especially women of color face when working in environments where they are underrepresented. Hamilton discussed statistics surrounding the underrepresentation of black nurses and black women chaplains, bringing into focus how this underemployment of healthcare professionals of marginalized identities negatively impacts patients of marginalized identities. She also advocated for a holistic approach to healthcare, naming the importance of caring for mental health and drawing connections between spirituality and physicality. In her words, “I believe these two cannot be separated; whole health is my spirit and my body.” Additionally, through her stories Hamilton drew attention to lateral violence within institutions and addressed how moral distress and moral

connections between spirituality and physicality. In her words, “I believe these two cannot be separated; whole health is my spirit and my body.” Additionally, through her stories Hamilton drew attention to lateral violence within institutions and addressed how moral distress and moral injury can be combated with moral courage and moral resilience. She finished her presentation with an encouragement for prospective chaplains to confidently define themselves.

During the last session, participants shared a meal while they heard from three more speakers. Rev. Kristen Hydinger, a researcher at the Danielson Institute, spoke on traits that have statistically been connected to increasing or decreasing risk of burnout and trauma in religious leaders, with simply being female contributing to an increased risk. Though many of these are traits inherent to who people are, Hydinger encouraged listeners to focus on changes that can help develop resilience, such as setting boundaries and spiritual and/or self-care practices like reflection. UCC pastor Rev. Philomena Hare shared moving stories about the people and communities which were foundational in building up her sense of enough-ness. She also centered rhythmic practices such as sabbath and regular prayer times as key practices to maintaining a sense of oneself in the face of the demands of the world. Cynthia N. Perry, who works with several nonprofits, reflected on liminal seasons and how one can feel inadequate despite extensive qualifications and experience. She encouraged people to embrace themselves as in the learning process and the idea that “maybe I’m not enough right now, but I will be later, and I’m okay with that.” After the speakers offered their prepared words, participants engaged in conversation with the panel and seriously reflected how we as individuals and community responded to this question. The event concluded with a prayer for being a non-anxious presence in an anxious world by Rev. Dr. Laurel Scott, who has participated in this conference for more than thirty years.

As the Anna Howard Shaw Center has listened to women’s voices through various workshops, programs, and academic research projects, we have heard many concerns about women’s confidence and associated challenges. Through this year’s conference, we found a way to nurture women’s confidence not only individually but also communally. “Am I enough?” Yes! I am and we are.

Rev. Philomena Hare
“Claiming Your Belovedness”



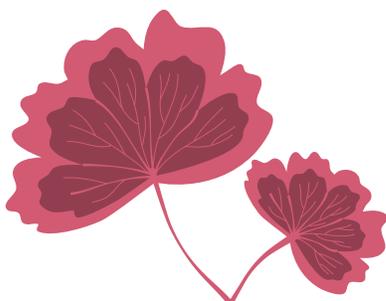
ACADEMIC FORTITUDE: A REFUGEE'S INSPIRATIONAL CLIMB - CLAUDINE UWIZEYIMANA

In academia, my journey is a testament to the transformative power of education. At just a year and six months old, I became a refugee, facing undeniable challenges. Yet, amid adversity, education became my beacon of hope. Raised by uneducated parents who valued learning, I developed an unwavering belief in the power of knowledge. Navigating academia presented challenges due to my experience with displacement. Adapting to its structured environment demanded resilience and perseverance. Despite numerous initial hurdles in understanding academic systems and adjusting to new social dynamics while constantly on the move, in June 2018, I became a first-generation graduate. Overcoming academic obstacles strengthened my academic prowess, honed my leadership skills, and they helped me discover newfound strength within me. Rooted in adversity, my journey equipped me with unique strengths to positively impact lives, communities, and the world.

Embracing a leadership role within the academic setting became a pivotal part of my journey, driven by the realization that my unique background could offer a fresh perspective. In the face of adversity, leadership took on a profound meaning, an unwavering determination to carve out a space for myself and others encountering similar challenges. My advocacy for inclusivity and diversity became a source of strength, acknowledging the transformative impact of education on individuals from varied backgrounds. Actively seeking opportunities to contribute, I championed initiatives catering to students with diverse experiences and extended mentorship to those confronting similar hurdles. Leadership in academia, I discovered, requires more than just resilience; it demands empathy, adaptability, and a steadfast commitment to fostering a supportive community. Through this experience, I realized that leadership goes beyond wielding authority, it's about empowering others and creating an environment where everyone can thrive.

To my fellow women navigating the academic landscape, embrace the uniqueness of your journey. While the challenges may seem formidable, view them as opportunities for growth. Be resilient, bold, and unapologetically yourself. Despite its challenges, your journey stands as a testament to your resilience. Seek mentorship, build networks, and support one another, recognizing that your voice matters and your perspective adds invaluable richness to the academic discourse. Remember, resilience goes beyond enduring difficulties; it's about thriving despite them. Never underestimate the power of continuous learning; it is a potent tool that can break down barriers and open doors to opportunities. As a woman in academia, your contributions are indispensable, and your voice holds significance. Stay determined, be proactive, and, most importantly, believe in your ability to instigate positive change. Each step forward is a victory, and every accomplishment contributes to the broader narrative of women excelling in academia.

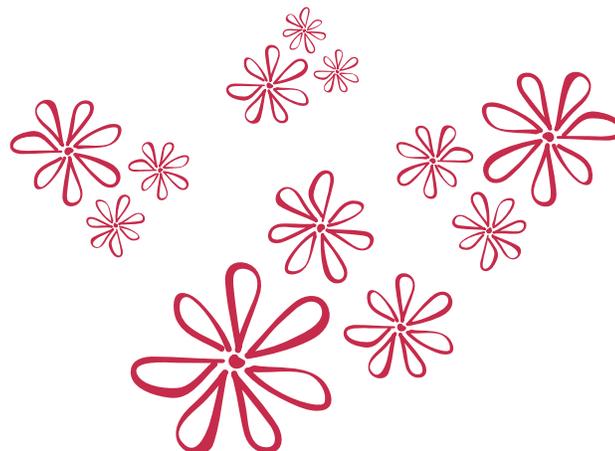
In conclusion, my academic journey, shaped by the challenges of being a refugee, is a testament to the transformative power of education. Embracing leadership within this setting allowed me to leverage my unique background for the betterment of the academic community. Through this experience, I discovered my resilience and learned the importance of fostering inclusivity. To aspiring women in academia, I encourage you to embrace your journey, leverage your strengths, and believe in the positive impact you can make.



Claudine Uwizeyimana, she/her
MDIV/MSW, STH



I traveled to Honduras on a short-term mission trip in my early twenties. We finished all our work at the communities after a week, and on our way back, I was the only bilingual person on the bus filled with CEOs and Veterinarians from all over the US. Our guide was riding the first bus ahead of us, and we were enjoying the trip somewhere near Tegucigalpa; we knew that soon we would arrive at the hotel and enjoy some rest time and a warm meal. But something unexpected happened: a group of soldiers stopped the bus. I remember sitting at the back and hearing the driver and the soldier speaking out loud and the passengers stretching their necks to see what was happening. At that moment, I noticed that the language barrier was a major problem; there was no translator on the bus—only a junior Mexican doctor starting to practice her English after several years of graduating a bilingual school. (Yes, that's me!) Since the men began to argue and the passengers were starting to get mad, I rose from my seat, ran to the front, and spoke to the soldier. He said that this was a security checkpoint and that he needed to perform a pat-down screening on each man; he was looking for weapons. I yelled with my thick accent that all gentlemen should get off the bus, but I didn't pronounce "gentlemen" very well, so no one moved. When I changed the word to "men," everyone understood, and they got off the bus. The soldier requested that all put their hands on the bus and separate their feet so the other soldiers could perform the screening. I didn't know how to translate that, so I only mimicked what the soldier required. For US citizens doing missionary work, this was not a pleasant experience at all! But they obeyed. As I spoke to the soldier, I mentioned some of the work that we did in the communities (veterinary care and construction work for communities in need), and the soldier realized that these were not dangerous people. I clearly remember that he reasoned and said, "These are children of God!" The guide arrived a few minutes later, almost fainting (probably sweating) and very worried, and you could see she ran back from where the first bus parked on the highway, maybe a quarter mile away from us. She arrived when all the missionaries were boarding the bus, ready to depart. This precious memory of human discomfort, my imperfect but helpful intervention, and the sincere acknowledgment of the soldier reminds me of how much I've grown.





Veterinary team in Rancho el Paraíso, Olancho Honduras. A veterinary student requested us to do what she called the “Megan” face.

I wonder what people mean when they speak about confidence. Do they refer to Confidence in what they do? Confidence in what they say? or Do they refer to inner confidence that doesn't require a single word or a perfect performance? Confidence comes from the inside, not from the outside. I've met successful professionals who are confident enough to accomplish brilliant goals in their specific major, but they painfully struggle with low self-esteem. Is it worth to shine in the public sphere and live in darkness in our personal dwellings? True confidence should be holistic, it should include a healthy understanding of our limitations and wounds and an active and correct addressing of our brokenness. Short-term missions helped me to understand this by bringing to light my lack of confidence in specific areas considering that there was no family network to rely on nor any other Mexican peer around who could help me process my international experience. Working on the stony terrain of our soul diligently, deconstructing the useless, and building new foundations based on emotional health is a titanic work but the best long-term investment of our lives. My confidence comes from my identity as a child of God which helps in understanding this complex process of progress in my soul. I wasn't trained to translate in such a specific situation in Honduras and I could have considered my performance as a failure. Still, this was the first of many unexpected multicultural situations in which I had to find ways to navigate and, every time, I learned something new.



Sandra Barrios, she/her
MDIV, STH

“Through our willingness to be the one we are,
we become one with everything.”
Gunilla Norris, “Paradox,” in *Sharing Silence*

I was sitting in a university classroom proctoring an exam with one other person. A few minutes after the exam began, a student approached me (I'll call her “Joeng”). She was slightly hunched over and holding her stomach. She whispered to me, “I'm feeling sick. I need to go to the bathroom.” Her face looked gaunt, and I had a God nudge to ask her if she could make it on her own. She gently nodded yes but everything else about her body language said no. “I'll walk with you,” I said. Before we could get to the bathroom door, she was gently leaning on my arm to steady herself. I helped guide her to her knees as she hunched over the toilet trying to throw up. She moaned that her menstrual period started on her way to the exam, and she needed her medication. After she felt settled enough to move out of the bathroom, she crouched onto the floor, leaning against a wall, while I went to get assistance. On my way, I ran into someone from the registrar's office (“Joshua”). I explained Joeng's situation to him and together we went back to her. She whispered to us that if she could just get her medication, she would be okay. I asked if there was a way to get her to Student Health and he stated we'd need to contact BU Police for assistance. Joshua returned to the registrar's office to contact BU Police while I stayed with the student.

Joshua returned a few minutes later with a BU police officer (“Bob”), an older Euro-American male. Bob tried speaking with Joeng but her soft whispers and Korean accent combined with his Boston accent and hearing difficulty made communication next to impossible. I had the God nudge to “translate.” Bob explained that he was not authorized to take her to Student Health so the only way to get her medication was for her to get home (which was next to impossible) or to call an ambulance to take her to the hospital. He called the ambulance and when the paramedics arrived, they tried to convince Joeng to go to the hospital. She was afraid to go, stating that as an international student, she wasn't sure her student insurance would cover the cost. Again I got the God nudge to gently intervene, expressing each party's concerns to the other. After Joshua noted that the school would help her connect with university resources for emergency situations if her insurance didn't cover the cost, Joeng went with the paramedics. When I finished proctoring, I followed up with the registrar's office. Joeng had been able to get her medication at the hospital and had returned to complete her exam.



As I later reflected on the situation, I was grateful for the myriad experiences that had enabled me to bring a sense of understanding to each of the parties involved. Following the God nudges throughout the situation, the pastor in me consoled and protected Joeng. The lawyer in me understood the legal concerns of Bob, Joshua, and the paramedic. The former hospital chaplain understood the paramedic's need to get Joeng to the hospital, regardless of financial concerns. And as someone with friends who are international students, I understood the student's legitimate financial worries. Most of all, because of past positive experiences with individuals of different racial, ethnic, and other societally designated identities, this African American female was able to connect with each of the people as the individuals they were beneath those identities and beyond stereotypes. I was able to calmly and confidently step into a leadership role, communicating with the parties involved and assisting them in communicating with each other in humane and holistic ways.

As you navigate academic and other spaces, I hope the above story will remind you of the following leadership necessities:

1. Bring all of you. Whether you are in a classroom listening and/or lecturing, participating in a meeting, or in an unanticipated situation, bring all of you. This is my advice to women in academia and in life. Too often we try to compartmentalize who we are, forgetting past jobs and experiences and even being ashamed of the past. To be a leader requires being present in the moment while having an ongoing awareness of and reflection on the past. Compartmentalize tasks if you so choose, but don't compartmentalize self. Bring all of you every day and everywhere.
2. Discernment, discernment, discernment. God will guide as to when we should speak or take action and if so, how. Building your relationship with Spirit, for example with daily meditation, prayer, journaling, nature walks, will help you to discern when Spirit is guiding or your own fears or desires for control.
3. Ask for help. Don't try to be the leader and the committee. As a leader in any situation, you are one among a host of people who can be of assistance.
4. Recognize the ways in which others can assist and the ways they may feel restricted from assisting or from following your lead. Encourage and support their efforts. Strong, compassionate leaders appreciate having strong, compassionate people around them.



La Ronda D. Barnes, she/her
PhD, STH



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TOPIC. Navigating Challenges: Redefining Success and Building Confidence.



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TOPIC. Confidence as Spiritual Discipline.



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GUEST. Kerlyne Pacombe, BU SW Field Education Coordinator

TOPIC. What Does Self-care Really Mean To You? How To Be A Wellness Warrior!



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TOPIC. True Self and Spirit: Building Confidence from Within.



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GUEST. Daniela Harrigan.

TOPIC. Morbeza: A Spirit of Survival



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GUEST. Dr. Choi Hee An.

TOPIC. Sharing Your Stories of Self-Confidence.



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Every Thursday @12:30pm in STH 320

GUEST. Rev. Dr. Karen Coleman.

TOPIC. The Joys of Being a University Chaplain.



Anna Howard Shaw Center
FREE LUNCH LECTURE
Every Thursday @12:30pm in STH 320

GUEST. Katelyn Robbins.

TOPIC. Community as a Source of Confidence.



Thank you to all the speakers and participants who attended these lectures!!



THURSDAY LECTURE PHOTOS



SHAW CENTER GRADUATION DINNER



Friends of the Anna Howard Shaw Center at Boston University School of Theology,

The Anna Howard Shaw Center is dedicated to celebrating and supporting the lives and ministries of women in the Church and the world. The Shaw Center is committed to promoting gender equality and providing a safe, supportive, and affirming community for all. We host a variety of events and activities, including a Thursday Lunch Lecture Series, Women in the World Conference, Women's Study Series, Celebrating Anna, and Multicultural events and more. We also offer a Spiritual Growth & Stress Support Group, which provides a confidential, safe, and comfortable space to support students through personal and academic adjustment and processes of vocational discernment.

Your generous donations will help us to continue to serve our students and faculty, support our mission, provide resources, create new programming, and continue to foster an environment that is supportive and empowering for all. Thank you for your consideration and generosity.

To those who constantly give to support the Center, our deepest thanks and gratitude for your partnership to continue to grow this center and make a difference in the lives of the people we serve.

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Rev. Dr. Choi Hee An

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Anna Howard Shaw Center Newsletter
Volume 41, Issue 2

