



Q & A



Power Women

Stories of Motherhood, Faith, and the Academy

October 5, 2021 | \$28, 248 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5306-9

Nancy Wang Yuen (PhD, University of California) is a sociologist and pop culture expert. She is the author of *Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism* and serves as an associate professor of sociology at Biola University. She has appeared on PBS, NPR, *NBC Nightly News*, BBC World TV, Dr. Phil, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. She is a guest writer at *Newsweek*, *Elle*, *HuffPost*, and *Self*.

Encouragement for Mothers in the Academy

IVP Academic Editor, Anna Moseley Gissing: What motivated you to take on this project? Was there a specific circumstance or event that inspired the book?

Deshonna Collier-Goubil: I became a mom while in a full-time faculty position. In Christian higher education, our environments are very family friendly, but navigating new parenthood is still daunting. I wished there was a resource that spoke to my unique circumstances.

Nancy Wang Yuen: I want to give voice to and provide a resource for others struggling to balance motherhood, the academy, and faith.

What are some challenges that Christian mothers in the academy face that seem different from challenges that perhaps all or the vast majority of academic mothers face?

Collier-Goubil: At times a person's religious beliefs can prevent them from seeking assistance and discussing things we do not often discuss in the church, such as infertility and child loss, or when a faculty mom is the head of her household. A Christian woman experiencing infertility has to consider not only the personal and medical repercussions of her decisions but also the social and professional. Similarly, a faculty mom who is head of household has to navigate the historical territory of the church that calls for male leadership in all areas and aspects of life (depending on faith background). Being a pastor, faculty, or mom, including a mom dealing with depression, or a mom of an exceptional child—these are areas that we fail to openly discuss in many churches, so where do we leave a faculty mama to turn for assistance?

As you gathered stories and worked with contributors, what is one thing you learned (or a highlight of that process)?

Collier-Goubil: I have been so inspired by the creativity, resilience, and brilliance of our contributing authors. They have navigated rough terrain and still show up in class perfectly assembled, carrying grace and mercy for students, and with a lesson plan ready to go! Then a few hours later, they become a problem solver in chief, assisting their littles to navigate all sorts of issues that life throws their way. They truly are power women!

Yuen: I learned from the contributors to conceptualize motherhood, the academy, and faith not as different spheres vying for our attention but synergistic assets.



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Deshonna Collier-Goubil (PhD, Howard University) is the founding chair of the department of criminal justice at Azusa Pacific University.

We're in the middle of a pandemic. Would you be willing to speak to the effects of this crisis on academic mothers in general or those you know personally?

Collier-Goubil: The moms I know personally are struggling. This pandemic has definitely affected all in a remarkable way. Faculty moms are burning the candle at both ends, so to speak, and trying to avoid burnout. It's a tough time for us all.

Yuen: Professor mothers who have to supervise or homeschool their children because of school and daycare closures are having a hard time finding work-life balance. At the same time, they also savor the slowing down of time with their children and families.

What is one message you hope readers take away from your book?

Collier-Goubil: We hope that readers find themselves, their colleagues, and faculty they supervise in our book. We hope that the stories of these powerful and faith-filled women will motivate us all to aspire to a higher-ed workspace that is more inclusive of the myriad pressures experienced by faculty moms.

Yuen: We want this book to be an encouragement for Christian professor mothers as well as a resource for all those who work alongside and supervise them.



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Answering a Threefold Calling: Motherhood, the Academy, and the Pastorate

The year I graduated with my PhD, I did what you should never do all at once: I defended my dissertation while pregnant, gave birth to my first child, moved internationally, and started my first full-time teaching job within a matter of months. My husband and I were living in England at the time. When Wheaton College came calling, we packed up our tiny flat, managed to get our newborn a passport, and moved to Illinois to begin the next chapter of our lives as a family of three. There was little to no room to manage an additional milestone, but I was also in the final stages of the highly intricate ordination process of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Ordination exams and field education requirements had long been completed during my studies at Princeton Theological Seminary, but a final examination on the floor of Presbytery still awaited me as a candidate for ordination. I was awash in the firsts of teaching and motherhood, and my husband was also finishing his PhD and pursuing ordination. It was enough to stay one day ahead of the demands, and I was stalled.

I remember the moment distinctly when things shifted. My dean sought me out in the hallway to ask about how my ordination process was coming along. I fumbled with explaining that teaching and the new baby were occupying my attention. Travel was required to finish up, and I was not at all sure how we could manage the cost or the time. She looked at me with understanding, and then she said firmly, without any equivocation, “We want you to finish the ordination process.” That verbal confirmation was exactly what I needed.

Soon after, Chicago Presbytery ordained me to the church office of Teaching Elder (*presbyter*) or Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Coming from a family filled with generations of pastors, my ordination was a family affair in every possible way. My father preached the sermon, my mother delivered the charge, my brother served on the clerical commission, and my husband offered the presentation of the candidate. Local and out-of-town friends and family sat in the pews of First Presbyterian Church of Glen Ellyn and witnessed the moment I took vows before the assembly to serve and honor the Triune God and the Body of Christ with all faithfulness and devotion to the Word of God to the very best of my abilities. For the first time, all three of my callings converged as I raised my hand to deliver the benediction to the congregation. I was a mother, a professor, and a Presbyterian minister. How was this going to work?

This book is a collective testament to the enormous amount of effort, resolve, endurance, and support that is required to manage the demands of both motherhood and academics. More often than not, the seasons of motherhood clash with the timelines for professional advancement. Motherhood does not easily align with the life of the mind, which requires space and time for sustained reflection, concentration, and output. The physical toll of pregnancy, labor, and recovery impacts everything—teaching, research, and publishing—with far reaching effects. The situation is further compounded when paid maternity leave is



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unavailable and the cost of full-time childcare is out-of-reach. A motherhood penalty can bear out in academics when the frequency of publishing is key to promotion and promotion is key to salary advancements—even within institutions that aspire to a level of equal pay between male and female professors. Meanwhile, promotion and tenure are to an extent dependent on student evaluations, which have frequently been shown to disadvantage women and minorities. These reasons and more have been identified in the scholarly literature as the cause of a persisting “gender gap” in academia with fewer women, particularly women of color, advancing to full professor and holding endowed chairs. Although women have earned more than 50 percent of all doctoral degrees since 2006, a “leaky pipeline” has meant that, as one ascends to the highest academic rankings, fewer and fewer women are found. In my case, as a European historian who works on rare manuscripts and books in foreign languages, research trips to national and international archives have proven to be the most difficult aspect of my academic work to negotiate with my motherly responsibilities.

When I was a bit more than three months pregnant with my third child, I began a research fellowship in order to consult a collection of university archives. The college had offered me a spacious apartment to live in for the month. I needed to bring my two daughters with me due to the length of the trip, but my husband was working full time and unable to get away. Without my parents willing and able to join me, the kids and I could not have embarked on our journey. Gratefully, we arrived eager to rest and settle in, but nothing started out as planned. Rather than receiving a welcome, I was unexpectedly told that my children could not stay in the apartment. Negotiations followed to allow me and the children on the premises. I was battling nausea from a combination of pregnancy and jet lag, but this was another level of discomfort entirely. The entire conversation was embarrassing, but I was also concerned that we would have no place to stay that was affordable or available at this late a point. In the end, we were shown to our apartment and given a map that included marked-out spaces where my children were not allowed to be seen or heard. In no uncertain terms, it was made clear to me that being a mother was beyond the pale of their expectation for suitable scholars and in every way a burden. The axiom—“We expect women to work like they don’t have children and raise children as if they don’t work”—had never rung so true. My entire experience there was undercut by their profound lack of hospitality, and sadly, for the duration of my stay, I was never able to shake the feeling of being unwelcome simply because my family was with me. Yet despite that difficult experience, I have nevertheless managed to bring my children on research trips with me, and I would never trade those moments with them despite the added financial costs (since grants are typically restricted from covering living costs that academic mothers manage), energy, and logistics required. In the end, to be able to show them the world through these opportunities has been a joy and a privilege rather than a burden.

Meanwhile, pastoral ministry as a woman adds its own complexities to life particularly when living and working in evangelical circles, though it was not always that way. Historic evangelicalism since the eighteenth century pioneered the advancement of women as public pastors before other Christian traditions. As historian Timothy Larsen writes, “This is a distinctive because no other large branch of the Christian family has demonstrated as long and deep a commitment to affirming the public ministries of women—not theologically liberal traditions, not Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodox traditions, not Anglicanism or other mainline Protestant traditions.” Wheaton College’s own story reflects these dynamics at its establishment in 1860 by Jonathan



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Blanchard when it became the first college in America to permit female students to enroll in the full curriculum offered, including homiletics.

It was not until the mid-twentieth century in the post-World War II context that a shift in outlook and practice became commonplace. According to Larsen's work, women's public ministry grew problematic with the emergence of the sexual revolution and its links with the feminist movement. As mainline denominations opened their doors to female pastors for the very first time, evangelical churches became more oppositional. I grew up navigating those waters in culturally conservative contexts, always uncertain whether my pastoral calling would be received or would be something of a liability. I have experienced both.

In some cases, I have been invited to speak on my area of academic expertise at a seminary or church where my ordination and pastoral ministry roles were acknowledged and celebrated, and in other cases, only my academic credentials were recognized due to the institution's restrictions on women in ministry. In the latter case, I have experienced a mix of emotions. On the one hand, my academic expertise has provided opportunities to speak into spaces where female professors in my discipline or female pastors would never be hired. In those situations, my goal has been to offer a winsome spirit, sharp mind, and an earnest heart for building bridges in the most gracious way possible. On the other hand, a lack of acknowledgement of the pastoral dimensions of my work and expertise has felt like a forced vocational fracturing. The academic mother and pastor is all too frequently put in the position of navigating, in multiple spaces, others' reception of her vocational callings as legitimate or not, and the act of accommodating can take a toll.

At no point has drawing these three paths together been simple or clear. Maintaining vocational commitments through different seasons of motherhood has required tremendous focus, energy, support, and encouragement from my faith in Christ. A threefold calling is certainly not celebrated in every context, and that reality has meant that I have had to learn to be highly adept at navigating different spheres of the church and the academy.

—Adapted from chapter nine "Answering a Threefold Calling: Motherhood, the Academy, and the Pastorate" by Jennifer Powell McNutt, PhD, FrHistS



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