

BOOKS

Mindful resistance

Mare Chapman's *Unshakeable Confidence* lays out a plan for female empowerment

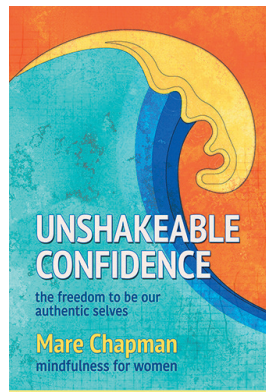
BY HOLLY HENSCHEN

Madison psychotherapist and meditation instructor Mare Chapman believes mindfulness is an important step toward empowerment.

Chapman has distilled the nine-week course she's taught for 20 years into a new self-published book, *Unshakeable Confidence: The Freedom to Be Our Authentic Selves*. Chapman's class teaches women how to dismantle the damaging thought patterns instilled by a male-dominated society while helping them learn to be at home in their own skin.

Chapman believes that women's self-confidence is eroded by living in a sexist culture. "It's still pervasive in our culture that women don't matter as much [as men]," Chapman says. "The effect of sexism and misogyny over a lifetime just strips away our sense of our self."

When treated as subordinates, women deflect attention away from themselves and focus on the external "other." This process leaves women caring for people to a fault, dependent on their approval and validation for self-worth. It also sets women up to



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judge and doubt themselves, leading to mental health issues.

"Subordination is oppressive, and oppression is depressing. It creates a lot of anxiety and a lot of very uncomfortable self-consciousness," Chapman says. "Our minds create a lot of fake news all the time."

In her first career as an occupational therapist, Chapman was founding director of Yahara House, a Madison community mental health center. But even in that leadership role, Chap-

man noticed that she second-guessed her performance and deferred to men.

"So much of my energy and my attention was focused on 'How should I look? What do I need to say? How should I respond?' and being really attached to that external impression," she says.

Digging for answers, Chapman studied insight meditation. Its core intention is to release the mind from conditioned habits in order to see reality clearly and access one's true nature.

"I thought, 'Holy cow, this is a profoundly radical and revolutionary practice!'" she says.

Chapman went on to study with Jon Kabat-Zinn, one of the first researchers to put meditation on the scientific map. Her other teachers represent a who's-who of the mindfulness movement: Jack Kornfield, Christina Feldman, Pema Chodron and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Unshakeable Confidence is an experiential handbook written in a nurturing yet matter-of-fact tone. Guided meditations and contemplations cap each section, directing readers inward.

"There's a deep longing as human beings to be authentic, to have real connections with ourselves and with each other," Chapman says. "It doesn't feel good to be fake."

Chapman's pleased that the timing of her book can help equip women with a broader awareness.

"It is such an important time for women to really step up," Chapman says. "We have to work with our minds to find our courage to step forward more strongly in the world, to have the confidence to run for office and to get involved." ■

Chapman will read from Unshakeable Confidence during a book launch on Feb. 17, 6 p.m., at A Room of One's Own.