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"You'll Become a Lioness"
African-American Women Talk About Mothering

> Being a woman is about … having positive, reciprocal relationships
> with your lover, your husband, your friends, your family. In other
> words, if you give, you want to get back. I don't believe in uncondi-
> tional love. —Camilla Cosby (quoted in interview in *O: The Oprah
> Magazine,* May 2000: 307)

Not long ago, I found myself interviewing a young African-American mother.
"I wish I could tell young girls that when they have a baby, they will change….
You'll become a lioness. You'll protect this baby!" Kennedy went on to describe
with calm conviction the ways her ambitions and confidence and resolve had
grown stronger since her son's birth five years earlier.

Indeed, Kennedy's comments were typical of the African-American
mothers that I interviewed. These women articulated a model of contemporary
motherhood that is pro-active, pragmatic, and multi-faceted. This "Lioness"
model undercuts the mainstream "Giving Tree" approach to motherhood
which dominates Euro-American thinking; I believe the insights of these
African-American women can help all mothers, Euro-American and African-
American alike, who are searching for new metaphors for motherhood in this
post-industrial age. Because of its theological/pastoral slant, the following
essay will be of special interest to those in positions of leadership in Christian
churches and other institutions whose membership includes mothers. Those
working with mothers in the settings of social agencies or the medical world will
find valuable insights.

This essay summarizes a series of interviews carried out in 1999. The
interviewees quoted in this essay are all African-American mothers who are
currently raising young children. To interpret the interviews, I draw upon

theories of African American feminists (notably Collins, 1990; Cole, 1993) and also upon Euro-American scholars, including theologians.

In the course of my interviews four themes emerged, which I will examine in greater detail below, quoting from the interviewees themselves: 1) These women speak candidly of the complexity of mothering—the joys as well as the fears, struggles, and injustices. 2) These mothers are determined to set an example for their children which combines both the virtues of achievement and the virtues of nurturing. (They assume that they will work outside the home, and that they will strive for upward mobility, as a way to promote their children's well-being.) 3) For these women, motherhood has fostered an expanded sense of self and a deeper spirituality, even when such spirituality is not well supported by organized religion. 4) These women shed light on the practical and spiritual needs of mothers, needs that could (and should) be addressed by Christian churches and other religious institutions.

The interviews

This essay focuses upon six interviews with African-American women. These six interviews were part of a larger study that included open-ended interviews with 25 individual women (all living in the U.S., of various ethnic backgrounds but predominantly Euro-American), during which each woman talked about her experiences as a mother in relation to her own spiritual development.

Of this smaller group (i.e., the African-Americans), all were mothers of one or two children ranging in age from two to twelve. The women's ages ranged from 23 to 47. All were relatively well-educated; one was working on a B.A., while all the others had completed college degrees, and two had masters' degrees as well. Two of the women were married, one was divorced, and three had never married. All came from married, two-parent homes. Finally, all were affiliated with different Protestant (Christian) denominations ranging from Pentecostal to Baptist to Episcopal.

The six African-American voices provided a striking counterpoint to the Euro-American mothers I interviewed. What distinguished them was the dramatic way they diverged from the conventional rhetoric of self-sacrifice which ran through the other interviews. Most of the Euro-American women accepted a line of thinking that ran something like this: "When I became a mother, I learned how to sacrifice so that I could become a good mother. I learned to put myself on hold for the good of my children." Another spiritualized this sacrificial ideal: "As a mother, you just keep giving and giving—even when you think you have nothing left to give…. It's like Jesus says—'Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it cannot create new life.' As a mother, I must 'die to myself.'"

I was surprised that despite many decades of consciousness-raising in the United States, many mothers, even those who are sophisticated, progressive, and feminist in other ways, do not challenge the assumption that motherhood

is founded on endless self-sacrifice. Others (such as Miller-McLemore) have referred to this as the "Giving Tree" approach to maternity (1994: 185).

The term "Giving Tree" refers to a very popular children's book by Shel Silverstein (1964) which portrays the generosity of an apple tree (not surprisingly portrayed as female) toward a little boy who grows into a self-seeking and exploitative man. Early on, the boy and tree have an intimate and joyful mutual relationship, but as the boy grows up he takes the tree's apples, then her branches, and finally her trunk (which he makes into a boat). When the tree has nothing else to give, the boy returns as a tired old man and sits on her stump, and "the tree was happy," having given everything with no thought of return. This heinous little tale is widely read as an example of altruistic love.

In contrast, Kennedy and the other African-American women I interviewed endorsed a model of motherhood that is like a Lioness rather than a Giving Tree (or stump). My interview sample is small (six interviews) so it is, of course, impossible to generalize about all African-American mothers based upon them. Still, the interviewees' positive self-definitions provide insight into contemporary American experiences of motherhood. Because religious faith has been an important source and strength and hope for many African-Americans, I give special attention to the things my interviewees say about what they need from their churches and other religious institutions.

Speaking candidly of the complexity of mothering

The women I interviewed all spoke with passion about the joyful aspects of motherhood. Compared to the Euro-American women I interviewed, these African-American were much more ebullient in describing the joy their children had brought them. For all of them, new motherhood had occurred in less than ideal circumstances, and it had brought unexpected challenges. Yet they all spoke with great vigor of their love for their children and the pleasure their children had brought them. For example, Anita was 24 and engaged to be married when she became pregnant. For several months, she wrestled with whether to continue the pregnancy. In the face of her misgivings, a difficult pregnancy, and a complicated birth, Anita was surprised by the pleasure she experienced once her son was born.

> *When I finally held my baby and nursed him, I was in tears—I was so relieved and happy! I was so glad I made that decision! I was so happy! John [my fiancé] said, "I told you so. I told you [that] you would be happy." And my baby [now age five] has been my sunshine since birth.*

Another woman, Gail, was 35 when she adopted an infant after many years of infertility treatment. Like Anita, she is surprised by joy:

> *I was thrilled. I was so ready for a baby. All of a sudden, all the anguish and tears of not being able to conceive, wanting a child—it was all gone. I lost*

about 15 pounds because I dropped all that weight of depression. I'd been carrying that burden of grief for seven years! [Bonding with my daughter] was a magical process. She put a new level of joy in my life that I did not know existed.

Certainly, women have been speaking of the joys of motherhood throughout time, but still I was surprised by how strongly these women emphasized this aspect. Their comments seem to reinforce Patricia Hill Collins' assertions that motherhood is a source of growth and hope in the African-American community, as well as a source of status and power (1990: 115). Compared to the Euro-American women I interviewed, these African-American women spoke more freely, perhaps because they are part of a community that assigns a greater value to motherhood.

Nonetheless, these mothers took a very pragmatic view of motherhood, speaking candidly of the sorrows and costs brought about by raising children. They are very aware of the physical challenges of pregnancy and birth, and also of the enormity of their task of raising children in a hostile environment.

Anthropologist Kathryn March makes an important point when she observes that, in mainstream U.S. culture, we promote an unbalanced view of maternity. "[W]e surround ourselves with a discourse of joy, ... deceived by our shared faith that chosen childbearing is always happy" (1994: 148). March studied women in Nepal who "publicly bewail infertility, repeat miscarriages, hard births, and deaths in [i.e., during] and near birth" (March 150). She found that Nepalese women "talk about loss and fear in mothering frankly and openly ... they are part of mothers' talk" (1994: 152-153).

Similarly, the African-American women I interviewed spoke frankly about fear and difficulty, even as they spoke about maternal pleasures. They all struck me as remarkably pragmatic and tough-minded in their ready assumption that the world is a foreboding and dangerous place for children and mothers. Like the Nepalese women, they were blunt regarding the difficulties of pregnancy and birth, and they were candid about the long-term challenges of childrearing. Anita puts it this way:

I'm raising a '90s child. Things are happening with black males now—to children now—that didn't happen when I was growing up. I have to worry about things my mother didn't worry about—I worry about my son being molested. The Black community has to work together to raise our children. We can't expect anyone else to look out for them.

On a similar note, Marcia is trying to teach her 18-month-old daughter to toughen up:

When she's doing something wrong and she gets hurt, I don't come running. She needs to learn how to behave.... I want to be a "hands-off mother"—

to stand back—lay down the law. As a single parent, I have to lay down the rules. I've seen doting ruin children, so I'm not going to dote.

Another woman, Nina, prepares her children for challenges by strengthening their moral characters:

We've tried to bring [our children] up the right way—morally—and teach them what's right—even though it's not what they will experience or what peer pressure is. We tried very very hard [to prepare ourselves] before becoming parents. I thought to myself, "I'm gonna make sure my child does this and this and this, and this is the way I'm gonna build this child up."

Anita is trying to instill a deep religious faith in her son, to help him in the face of injustices or dangers:

I'm trying to teach him that you have to believe that God is going to bring you through any situation, through all the storms. Your faith will be tested. There will be obstacles put in your way. You have to rely on God to bring you through the storm.

While some of the women were more explicit than others in talking about racial injustice, all were sure that there would be "storms" in their children's futures, and that their task as mothers included "building [their children] up."

Moreover, the women I interviewed saw childrearing from the outset as solitary and difficult. Kennedy, for example, talks about the loneliness of early motherhood:

No one told me how difficult it would be.... I was by myself. [My first day home from the hospital,] my husband had a houseful of people wanting to see the baby. They weren't any help. I remember nursing [my son] in my room and crying and wondering when all those people would leave. Why couldn't they bring a covered dish or [greeting] card and leave? They didn't help at all.

Another woman, originally from Africa (Sierra Leone), comments on how lonely she finds childrearing in the U.S.:

[Our isolation] hits me whenever I have to fill out any forms for my kids— who should we contact in case of emergency? That particular line is always blank for us, because [my husband and I] have nobody here. It's a big struggle for us.

She poignantly compares her own experience with the treatment of mothers and children "back home" in Africa:

[Back home] when you become a new mother, you don't even cook for a long time. You just sit and take care of the baby—you don't even have to get up.... Everyone is at your beck and call. You don't even have to ask. People just stream to your house and do everything for the baby. They send food. [An older woman] will take charge of your baby and come every morning and wash the baby's hair, bathe the baby, do everything for you. you.... At home the family is very important, but here [U.S.] people don't tolerate the kids. They invite you but they don't want the kids.... Some people don't even want kids in their houses. They will have an animal and prefer that animal in their house to having a child....

All the women had received practical support in early motherhood from their own mothers; two said that their mothers came to stay for several weeks post-partem, and another (the only one who lived in the same city as her own mother) reported that her mother helped with child-care while she worked.

Still, of all the women I interviewed, only one (the oldest of the group at age 47) described a dense network of family and friends. All the others felt that the task of childrearing rested upon her shoulders alone, or upon hers and her husband's. This sense of isolation challenges Collins' 1990 assertion that Black mothers mother within a context of women-centered networks that support biological mothers. In fact, all the women I interviewed expressed a strong commitment to their extended families, especially their parents. Yet often family loyalty meant more responsibility, not necessarily more support. Kennedy repeats a common theme:

When [my son] was about three, I went home to take care of my mother [who was dying of cancer]. I'd take her to chemo, talk to the doctor.... Taking care of my mother ruined my marriage—my husband felt so neglected that he had an affair.

Several of the women were aware that daughterly care-giving had caused them to neglect other relationships, including spouse and children. Career advancement had also been affected. Some of the women mentioned that such care-giving was distributed unevenly within families. Sons, even much-favored sons, did not exhibit the same filial devotion as daughters. Marcia comments on gender roles within her family:

In my family, the brothers were cherished but not the girls. Myself, I wasn't mothered well. Most Black women will tell you that their brothers got better treatment, and so do their brothers' kids.... And not much is expected from them.

It is only fair to point out that even though these women experienced limited practical support, most reported a strong sense of emotional support

from their families. In the face of practical needs (including financial, child-care, health care, housing, etc.), most women felt they were on their own. Still, all said they felt very emotionally connected to family and friends. Anita, for example, lived at a distance from her family during her pregnancy, yet she reported that her mother and several sisters each traveled 600 miles to spend time with her. Marcia said that she had several friends who were away at school yet kept in touch with her, and Nina [the woman orignally from Sierra Leone] maintained ties with extended family throughout the U.S. and overseas by means of letters and family reunions.

For most of these women, a loss of practical support was a trade-off caused by upward mobility. All had moved geographically once or more for college or employment. Most would envy the situation described by the woman from Africa, who recalls, "Back home, there are always lots of relatives around. There is family right through your life. If you have problems in your marriage or with your kids, there is help. There is always someone to watch your child. You are never all alone." Perhaps the sense of isolation was a factor of age; most of the women were still completing their education or launching careers. Perhaps as they get older they will be able to tap into a network of support such as Collins (1990) described. It is unfortunate that for these women, as for most mothers in the U.S., the intense demands of early parenting coincide in time with the geographic mobility often required to advance their education and careers.

In summary, the women I interviewed expressed a thoughtful and complex view of mothering. While they were in touch with the profound joys of motherhood, they were also aware of racial injustice, fears for their children, inequities within their extended families, and social isolation. The word that came up over and over again was responsibility. All these African-American women were emphatic about the colossal sense of responsibility that came with children, much more emphatic than the Euro-American women I interviewed. I found myself wondering if this were a response against the internalized image of the "welfare mother" that Collins (1990) wrote about as a false and destructive stereotype. All were determined never to become dependent in such a way; rather, they had definite ideas about creating a better life for themselves and their children.

Setting an example for their children

The women I interviewed all speak of motherhood in terms that challenge the mainstream United States culture. Theologian Teresa E. Snorton points out that the "cult of true womanhood" has shaped how we think of family life in the U.S., yet that "cult" is Euro-centric, in direct contrast to the African-American understanding of womanhood.

> The [so-called] true woman is self-contained within her nuclear family, with specific and separate roles for men and women, and with an economic dependence on men, in such a way that motherhood is

one's true occupation" (Snorton, 1996: 57).

Psychoanalyst Roszika Parker describes the ideology surrounding motherhood in slightly different terms,

> Despite changing beliefs about babies' capacities and thus childcare priorities, the representation of ideal motherhood is still almost exclusively made up of self-abnegation, unstinting love, intuitive knowledge of nurturance, and unalloyed pleasure in children. (Parker, 1995: 22)

Such narrow views of motherhood may have little to do with contemporary reality, especially for the vast majority of African-American women. Snorton observes, "Flexible sex roles, outside-the-home employment, and a responsibility to and for one's extended family are certainties and necessities for most African-American women." (1996: 57) Hence motherhood as one's "true [and only] occupation" is a view that few African-American women have wanted to adopt. In prizing motherhood, rather, they have adopted healthy attributes that include self-sufficiency, independence, personal accomplishment, alongside the capacity for nurturing and caring (Cole, 1993: 71).

The women that I interviewed spoke with pride of their capacities to bring such a range of attributes to their mothering. Specifically they spoke of being an example to their children, providing a strong foundation, and passing on a deep religious faith. Kennedy, for example, speaks of her new self-confidence:

> *It used to be, my self-esteem was flat line.... Now I take a stand. I'm involved with my son's school—I have to protect him!... My [six-year-old] son sees me study. He'll lay on the bed beside me when I'm studying, and I'll say, "When it's your time to go [to college], maybe you'll appreciate it.... My being in school is gonna do you a world of good!" I can't let myself feel guilty. I'm making a better life for us!... I wish I could tell young girls that when they have a baby, they will change. You may be a passive wimp, but you'll become a lioness. You'll protect this baby!*

On a similar note, Marcia felt that her first pregnancy helped her develop virtues that lay the groundwork for the coming years:

> *The process of carrying [my child in the womb] was a spiritual experience. You have to reach in every day and find the strength to move forward. You gotta find a spiritual force to get up.... Through my pregnancy, I learned to lean on God, because I [as an unmarried mother with little support] was the one with complete responsibility.... To me God is a force, a spirit that helps you in hard times. I'm learning to be independent, self-sufficient— you have to!*

While some might think that "leaning on God" is incompatible with being "independent, self-sufficient," Marcia's experience suggests otherwise. Anita also links personal strength and determination with religious faith, and she sees all these as important traits to model to her five-year-old son:

After I finish my master's [degree], I really want to get a PhD. I want [my son] to see that learning is cool, that great things happen to people who go to college. But it's not enough for him to see "My mother goes to work and she brings home a paycheck and she goes to school and she's really smart"— he also needs to see my relationship with God. I am driven to be closer to God because I need to be an example to my son. He needs that spiritual foundation too! I want him to know that if you believe in God and have faith, good things will happen . That's what my life has been based upon.

According to Snorton, surrender to God is an essential way of coping for African-American women: "The womanist shifts her focus from the finitude of life to the transcendent nature of the human experience. This is not a 'pie in the sky,' [or] 'otherworldly' attitude but rather a survivalist stance" (1996: 57).

The women I interviewed embody a wide range of healthy attributes. On the one hand, they carry out the traditionally feminine tasks of nurturing, protecting, and training children, but they bring to those tasks many traits often considered masculine, including strength, determination, self-sufficiency, courage, and industry.[1] Other abilities that the women spoke of were the ability to juggle competing responsibilities, to cultivate serenity in the midst of difficulty, and to play and enjoy life. Many expressed appreciation toward their children for teaching them these latter traits.

Cole points out that strong African-American women have often unfairly been made to feel defensive or guilty for their strength (1993: 71). A more appropriate description comes from spiritual writer, Edith Stein (1891-1942). A Carmelite nun writing in the 1940s, Stein is an unlikely spokesperson for contemporary African-American mothers, yet her comments fit the African-American women I interviewed:

Christ embodies the ideal of human perfection: in Him all bias and defects are removed, and the masculine and feminine virtues are united and their weaknesses redeemed. That is why we see in holy men a womanly tenderness.... while in holy women there is a manly boldness, proficiency, and determination. (Stein, 1996: 84)

An expanded sense of self and a deeper spirituality

The strong emphasis on spirituality surprised me, in light of the fact that my interviewees all reported strained or disappointing relationships with organized religion. All were affiliated with Protestant Christian churches, yet none expressed satisfaction with them, and most felt that becoming a mother

had alienated them from their churches. For example, Anita, the daughter of a minister, felt hurt by her church:

> *My church said, "You're a disgrace for having a child outside wedlock...."*
> *I say, "You don't pay my bills—I don't need you —what right do you have*
> *to judge me?" But deep down it hurt me. I couldn't bring myself to go to*
> *church or read the Bible for four years.*

All had experienced difficulty finding a church where they felt at home. One felt uncomfortable with the formality of her husband's Episcopal church, others found their churches to be unfriendly or too large, and some felt their churches did not provide enough attention to their children.

Yet, in spite of this alienation from religious institutions, all the women expressed belief in God as a source of comfort, guidance, and strength. One woman asked to be baptized during her first pregnancy, and all felt it was important to raise their children as part of a religious tradition. And all the women I interviewed spoke of a deepening spirituality. Anita, for example, speaks vividly about her prayer life:

> *With a newborn son, I prayed more than I had ever prayed before. My labor*
> *had slowed down, so on the delivery table I prayed and cried and prayed—*
> *"God please let me push this baby through the birth canal!" God helped me*
> *give birth. Once I had [my son], I was so scared! I had never held a baby*
> *before. I said, "God, you have got to walk me through this process. Give me*
> *the knowledge and strength to take care of my son." He helped me. When he*
> *cried, I would sing, "Yes, Jesus loves me." That would soothe him and soothe*
> *me too—because I knew Jesus does love me.*

Gail also spoke about praying in an unconventional way:

> *I love walking in the morning when it's quiet—that's my serenity. I don't*
> *need organized religion.... I have this keen sense of another world. I'm*
> *raising a child, and I recently helped my mother die [by caring for her during*
> *her last months] and then my father.... All these things have made me grow*
> *spiritually.... Some new things are opening up in my life [and] when it's*
> *time, that door will open and I'll go through it.... I'll be ready for it, and*
> *that's what I want to teach my daughter. To be ready. To be ready.*

As the women spoke of spirituality, I was struck by the absence of an emphasis on self-sacrifice. According to theologian Brita Gill-Austern, Christians have historically been shaped by a theological tradition that views self-denial and self-sacrifice as the defining attributes of Christian love (1996: 308). Gill-Austern observes that for most women "the unholy trinity of self-abnegation, self-doubt, and false guilt [are] always knocking at the door"

causing them to feel they are less important, less valuable, and less essential than men (1996: 307). If self-sacrifice is held up as an ideal for Euro-American Christians, it is held up all the more highly for those within such traditions who are mothers.

The women I interviewed were aware of the ideal of self-sacrifice with its attendant false guilt and self-doubt, yet they do embrace that "unholy trinity"; it is as if self-abnegation, self-doubt and false guilt are intruders they cannot afford to admit. Several expressed ambivalence about having to leave a young child in child-care, for example, or sorrow about having to work or study long hours, but they did not speak in terms of feeling guilty. Gail was typical:

> *When I went back to work, I missed her terribly—it was physically painful. I hated it. Then you know you adjust and that was just reality. I come from a household where my mother always worked. That's a reality. Black women are used to two income households because financially most households needed two incomes in order to survive.*

Moreover, although all the interviewees were making personal sacrifices to ensure a better life for themselves and their children, no one sentimentalized or idealized sacrifice as a desirable ideal. Rather than saying "I will imitate Christ by suffering and sacrificing," these women seem to say, "I want my kids to have a better life. I will do what it takes to make that happen, and God will give me strength" (Gill-Austern, 1996: 309). Gill-Austern sees the Christian ideal of love as self-sacrifice as inherently misguided. She writes,

> Jesus' teaching was simply not disinterested or devoid of all self-concern. He wanted to show others how their life might be enhanced if they followed in his way. His way entailed suffering and required sacrifice but its promise, its ultimate destination, was abundant life and joy. (1996: 309)

Gill-Austern's emphasis on "abundant life and joy" resonated throughout all my interviews with African-American mothers, much more strongly than those with Euro-American mothers. They had their eyes set on the goal of a better, more abundant life, and were willing to endure what it took to realize that life; they had no need to seek out or idealize self-sacrifice.

Shedding light on the practical and spiritual needs of mothers

Since historically many African-Americans have looked to church as an important source of community and guidance, I asked each woman what they would like to receive from their churches. In some cases, I prodded them to think about needs that have not been traditionally addressed by churches. Six areas of need emerged that will be of interest to those in leadership in Euro-American churches as well as African-American churches. Social agencies

seeking to support mothers and children would also do well to listen to these themes.

a) *Practical support and knowledge.* All the women felt a need, especially in very early motherhood (i.e., the first few months), for practical support in the form of child-care, household help, and meals. During this intense period of adjustment, many women felt "spiritual help means practical help." In addition, women commented on the need for information on topics such as breastfeeding, child immunizations, CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation), nutrition, child-hood illnesses, maternal health. Virtually no one felt they had received adequate information about these issues from the medical world, and many expressed the belief that these basic concerns went hand in hand with their desire for spiritual growth; spiritual needs could not be separated from practical health and household-related needs.

b) *Guidance in prayer.* Women expressed a need to "move to a new level" in terms of their spirituality. Personal prayer and communal prayer both become more important to a woman who is adjusting to new and ongoing motherhood. Anita's example of asking God to help her deliver her baby, and of singing "Jesus Loves Me" to her newborn baby suggest a few forms such prayer might take. Many women felt that motherhood forced them to grow spiritually and that personal prayer was an important avenue for such growth. To my surprise, few expressed concern for feminine images of God.

c) *Intergenerational support for childrearing.* Women expressed a longing for a church as a source of community, especially for their children. My interviewees felt the need and desire for people of a range of ages to help them to "build up" their children spiritually—by loving their children, advising them as mothers, and being role models for children. One woman said that single mothers were often not adequately included in church-communities. Another observed that African-American churches had a huge reserve of competent and wise older women and grandmothers who could be a tremendous resource for young mothers. One woman commented, "Churches could offer parenting classes. There's a wealth of resources in a lot of churches, a wealth of professions—people whose kids are grown, who have raised successful children—they could offer classes out of their experience."

d) *Good religious education for their children.* These women desire churches where their children are welcomed and receive good instruction. Some expressed impatience with "long, dull religious services" or with "enforced passivity" for children. Some mentioned children's church, a good nursery, and Vacation Bible School as desirable ministries in a church, and said that these were less common now than when they themselves were children.

e) *Preaching and teaching that reflect their own life experience as growing adults.* These women desire sermons and teaching that focus on growth and hope and "abundant life" rather than on death and self-sacrifice. They would like to hear from the pulpit their experiences as mothers and as people seeking to grow into full personhood. Both strength and vulnerability should be valued

for both men and women. Especially, women desire a place where they can express vulnerability and need and yet feel safe and cherished. All the women felt they were growing and that the church was a place that could help women grow into full personhood.

f) *An outlet for their talents*. These women were eager to give to a church community as well as receive from it. Many women felt they had untapped gifts. Anita, for example, said, "I would love to teach parenting classes—I would love to take that on. My friends [with new babies] come to me for leadership [because my son is doing so well]." Women want to contribute to their church without emulating "the giving tree model of spirituality," that is, endless self-giving without mutuality (Miller-McLemore 185).

[1]Philosopher Sara Ruddick (1995) offers a helpful definition by focusing on their work as mothers: "Mothers are not identified by fixed biological or legal relationships to children but by the work they set out to do … . [M]others are people who see children as 'demanding' protection, nurturance, and training; they attempt to respond to children's demands with care and respect rather than indifference or assault" (xi). Writing 50 years earlier, Stein speaks of mothers' inclination to "cherish, guard, and preserve" (1996: 73).

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