

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

---

African-American Studies Theses

Department of African-American Studies

---

Spring 5-10-2014

## Maternal Ministry, Other Mothering, And Finding Power For Women In The Black Church: A Phenomenological Exploration

Shauntia Lovett

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/aas\\_theses](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/aas_theses)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lovett, Shauntia, "Maternal Ministry, Other Mothering, And Finding Power For Women In The Black Church: A Phenomenological Exploration." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2014.  
[https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/aas\\_theses/23](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/aas_theses/23)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of African-American Studies at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in African-American Studies Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

MATERNAL MINISTRY, OTHER MOTHERING, AND FINDING POWER FOR WOMEN IN THE BLACK  
CHURCH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

by

SHAUNTIA N. LOVETT

Under the Direction of Makungu Akinyela, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Studies have examined the ways in which *other mothering* functions in the black community. Yet, few scholars have investigated how *other mothering* may operate in religious environments. This study utilizes a qualitative design with a feminist phenomenological approach to explore the ways in which the phenomenon of *other mothering* has evolved into a ministry for black women. A sample of 14 African American women were selected from the membership of two metropolitan Atlanta area churches, Mt. Olive Baptist Church and Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using descriptive and pattern coding. Womanist theology was chosen as the theoretical framework. The researcher believes that this study contributes to the body of existing literature that examines mothers' ministries and that the participants find liberation through their mothering roles despite their historical marginalization in the church.

INDEX WORDS: Black church, Black women, Bible, Motherhood, Other mothering, Maternal ministry

MATERNAL MINISTRY, OTHER MOTHERING, AND FINDING POWER FOR WOMEN IN THE BLACK  
CHURCH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

by

SHAUNTIA N. LOVETT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Masters of Arts  
in the College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University  
2014

Copyright by  
Shauntia Nakole Lovett  
2014

MATERNAL MINISTRY, OTHER MOTHERING, AND FINDING POWER FOR WOMEN IN THE BLACK  
CHURCH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

by

SHAUNTIA N. LOVETT

Committee Chair: Makungu Akinyela

Committee: Monique Moultrie

Akinyele Umoja

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University  
May 2014

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family: My mother, Alva, thank you for all of your love and support during this process. Antwan, my brother, us working on our theses together has made this process a lot easier and bearable. I love you both.

This work is also dedicated to my church family, Mt. Olive Baptist Church. The members here have taken such a vested interest in my education. They are partly the reason why I kept pushing forward with this thesis. I am very appreciative for all of your support.

Finally, this work is dedicated to those who participated in this study and to all of the *other mothers* who thought it not robbery to stand in as parental figures to those who needed or need you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my thesis committee. Dr. Makungu Akinyela, thank you for your support and guidance, for believing in this topic and grounding me so deeply in its importance. Dr. Monique Moultrie, thank you for expertise on women in the church and giving my thesis another woman's touch. You have become an *other mother* to me. Dr. Akinyele Umoja, thank you for taking the time to prepare me for the criticisms I will receive for conducting a study of this nature. Thank you Dr. Davis for your love, support, guidance, and for keeping me sane throughout this entire process. I would also like to thank the African American Studies department, for without them, this study would be impossible. Lastly, thank you to my dear friend, Jasmine Tillman for your support and to all of my old and new *other mothers* who nurtured me through this process.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Background.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Problem Statement.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3 Purpose of Study .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.4 Significance of Study.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.5 Nature of Study.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.6 Research Questions.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.7 Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.8 Definitions of Terms.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.9 Assumptions and Biases.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.10 Scope, Limitations, and Delimitations.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.11 Summary.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.1 The Black Church: More Than Just a Religious Institution.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.2 Theological Discourse.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.3 Locating Spaces for Black Women in Biblical and Theological     Discourse.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.4 Black Women React to Their Neglect.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.5 Gender Roles in the Black Church.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.6 Mothering in the Black Church.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>2.7 Summary.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>3 METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>3.1 Research Design.....</b>	<b>30</b>



3.2 Participants.....	32
3.3 Procedures.....	33
3.4 Instrument.....	34
3.5 Data Analysis.....	35
3.6 Reliability and Validity.....	35
3.7 Summary .....	35
<b>4 FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>37</b>
4.1 Church Histories and Affiliations.....	38
4.2 The Participants.....	43
4.3 Data Analysis.....	46
4.4 Discussion of Themes and Categories.....	46
4.5 <i>Other Mothering in the Church</i> .....	47
4.5.1 <i>Love, Mothering, and Ministry</i> .....	47
4.5.2 <i>Teaching are ministers too</i> .....	50
4.6 Everyday Experiences and Mothering.....	53
4.6.1 <i>Other Daughters to Other Mothers</i> .....	53
4.6.2 <i>The Intersection of Church, Community, and Family</i> .....	59
4.7 Ideas About Faith and the Bible.....	64
4.7.1 <i>Servanthood and Being Christ-like</i> .....	64
4.8 Women Empowered by their Ministerial Roles.....	66
4.8.1 <i>Women Ordained by God</i> .....	66
4.8.2 <i>Women Affirmed in the Bible</i> .....	68
4.9 Summary.....	69
<b>5 CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>71</b>
5.1 Discussion.....	72

<b>5.2 Implications.....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>5.3 Recommendations.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>5.4 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Appendix A: Informed Consent.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Appendix B: Demographic Survey.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Appendix C: Instrument for Focus Group.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Appendix D: Instrument for Individual Interviews.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Appendix E: Church Bulletin Post.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Appendix F: Recruitment Flyer.....</b>	<b>103</b>

**LIST OF TABLES**

<b>Table 4.1: Study Participants.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Table 4.2: Themes and Categories.....</b>	<b>47</b>

## 1 Introduction

This chapter explains the background of the research questions, as well as the significance and the nature of the study. This chapter also includes the purpose of the study and the problem statement. The research questions, theoretical framework, and important definitions of key terms are also included in this section. Finally, the biases and limitations of the study are addressed.

### 1.1 Background

Mothering within religious institutions may take different forms, but there is a clear link between black women's roles as mothers and their ability to provide spiritual guidance to those (children and adults) who may or may not be biologically their own. As I reflect on Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin In The Sun*, I remember the importance of a scene between a mother and daughter. In this scene, the mother uses her maternal identity to impart faith-based lessons to her daughter who doubts the importance of being religiously grounded in the Gospel of Christ and questions her overall belief in God. See scene below as quoted by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990):

**Beneatha:** "Mama, you don't understand. Its all a matter of ideas and God is just one idea I don't accept...There is simply no blasted God -there is only man and it is he who makes miracles!"

**(Mama slaps Beneatha powerfully across her face.)**

**Mama:** "Now- you say after me, in my mother's house there is still God. (Pause) In my mother's house there is still God."

**Beneatha:** "In my mother's house there is still God" (p.57).

In this scene, Hansberry both captures the role that motherhood plays in Christian youth development and demonstrates the African American cultural critique of reliance on *man* instead of God. This interaction between Beneatha and Mama stands to represent the ways in which black mothers incorporate their religious beliefs into their rearing of their children and how they relay the importance of having a relationship with God. Growing up, my biological mother made sure to instill Christian values in me, but so did the maternal figures at my church home, Mt. Olive Baptist

Church (Mt. Olive) or as I often call them, *maternal ministers*. Black women, who may or may not have children, may portray this type of ministry because many women share similar maternal instincts which they may use to spiritually feed parishioners. This thesis looks at these *maternal ministers* as *other mothers* by examining black women's relationships with children and adults who are not biologically their own regardless of whether they are biological mothers or not.

The current study developed as an extension of an auto-ethnography I constructed about my experiences at my church home, entitled, "Maternal Ministers, Other Mothering, and Finding Power for Women in a Black Baptist Church: An Auto Ethnographic Exploration." Upon finding that black women have been considered subsidiary assets to men in the church and reflecting on the perception of black women in my own church, I grew interested in studying the laywomen at my church and the ways in which they have and will potentially be marginalized. Mt Olive is where my mother, father, brother, grandmother, immediate and extended family presented me at the altar in front of a large congregation and allowed my former pastor to christen me. Growing up in this church and forming relationships with three different pastors has provided me with varying experiences. Bishop Richard B. Lankford, Sr. christened me and had a special relationship with the children of the church. Most of the children considered him to be like a second father to them. Up until this day, whenever he visits the church for special programs or events, the youth flock to him because they miss his fatherly presence. My second pastoral relationship was with Pastor Samuel L. Williams. Sadly, my relationship with him was short-lived, for he passed after a few short years of ministering. Pastor Jimmy R. Gibson Sr. is my current pastor. He baptized me at the age of twenty-one. His motto has remained, "Love is what love does" (Gibson, 2011). I try to live by this mantra and I respect my pastor, but my religious experiences are informed and shaped by the black women in my church, who have relayed the importance of faith through their roles as mothers.

I have grown up in the midst of black women who take on roles as church mothers, ministers, ushers, youth coordinators, and deaconesses. The aforementioned list is inadequate to

label their numerous roles. As a member of this Baptist church, I have been taught to look to my pastor, my spiritual leader, or spiritual “daddy” as I have often heard him say, to receive guidance as a Christian (Gibson, 2013). Initially, I grew to internalize the belief that the pulpit is considered “men’s space” while the pew is considered a “women’s place” (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, p.274). Yet, the women at Mt. Olive are positioned in many different spaces outside of the pews and many of them have become of central importance to me as *maternal ministers*. I deem these women *maternal ministers* because they impart religious teachings through the role of a mother. In order to define motherhood, I relied on my own interpretation of motherhood and Teresa Fry Brown’s discussion of her ancestor’s attributes. I define a mother as someone who is female, a disciplinarian, a nurturer, a caretaker, a counselor, and a role model. Brown (2000) historically contextualizes mothering through a discussion of her ancestors, showing how the strength of her foremothers informs her perception of motherhood and *other mothering*. Brown (2000) uses terms, “Backbone, courage, durability, energy, fortitude, nerve, stability, tenacity, and vitality...the mentality, strength, intensity, faithfulness, and forbearance” to describe her ancestors that endured the numerous adversities that have plagued the black community (p. 9). When combining both my understanding of mothering and Brown’s description of her ancestors, I saw an adequate lens to examine examples of mothers and *other mothers*. Many of the women at my church exude the aforesaid characteristics. As elders, youth coordinators, and ministers just to name a few roles, these women have acted as conventional and unconventional ministers to me and provided guidance to the pastor’s flock through their church work. Thus, their roles are just as essential as the pastor’s.

I developed the idea of *maternal ministry* from the concept of *other mothering*, which stems from the idea of community mothering, which will be explained more precisely in chapter two of my thesis. Edwards (2000) cites James (1993) who defines *other mothering* as “acceptance of responsibility for a child not one’s own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal” (p.88). Other mothering comes from West African practices of communality. The period of enslavement

called for *other mothers* and childcare and became the assumed task of black women in addition to their other tasks. Due to the instability of familial structures during this period, black women often found themselves caring for children that were not their own, when the biological mothers of enslaved children were sold to different plantation owners (Edwards, 2000). Thus, *other mothering* became a survival mechanism for the enslaved community. By historically contextualizing *other mothering*, it is clear that black motherhood may extend beyond blood relations and have a religious influence upon those who rely on *other mothers* for spiritual guidance.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

In chapter one of Stephanie Mitchem's, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, entitled, "Black Women: Race, Class, and Gender," Mitchem (2002) cites Michelle Wallace (1990), who posits, black women suffer from "invisibility blues" in that, "what most people see of the black woman is a void, a black hole, that appears to be empty, not full" (p.19). The purpose of Mitchem's chapter is to represent the intersectionality between race, class, and gender; three interlocking systems of oppression that have marginalized black women despite their significance to the black community and the black church. Ultimately, "Black women continue to struggle against misrepresentation in a society that still undervalues who they really are" even in religious environments (Mitchem; 2002, p.19). Although, the black church is an intricate component of black culture, being a place where those of the black community have sought solace in the face of adversity, it has not been equally liberating for all members of the community. African American women play a pivotal role in religious communities, often taking on multiple responsibilities and roles, maintaining the functionality of their affiliated church and/or institution (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). Yet, their invisibility has been perpetuated, which neglects not only their duties in the church but their postionality, which is informed by the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. In my research, I have found there to be an array of research produced on the church being a platform for social and political activism in an effort to fight for the civil and human rights of those of African descent

(Higginbotham, 1993). However, men were at the forefront of freedom movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement and allotted most of the credit for its development. Black women were left at the sidelines, despite being the ones who gathered resources within communities, churches, and social organizations to maintain the success of such freedom initiatives. As a result of their misrepresentation, it is important to acknowledge black women's contributions to the community and religious environments.

In biblical and theological texts, black women have become mere footnotes, failing to be adequately recognized as contributors to black religious scholarship. Despite their dehumanization, their oppression has been seemingly ignored, for black women have majorly occupied the marginalized spaces in religious texts. However, over the past forty years, womanist theologians and even some black male theologians have begun to integrate women into "God-talk," discussing the ways in which their lived experiences inform their understanding of theology and interpretation of who Jesus is in their lives. Whereas black women's visibility has been a rising issue, the intersectionality of black women's racist, sexist, and classist oppression is now being examined in religious discourse by womanist theologians such as Jacquelyn Grant, Delores Williams, Linda Thomas, and many more. The aforementioned scholars' discussion of womanist theology will be used to examine the ways in which *maternal ministers* practice womanist theology. This study seeks to help alleviate the varying "invisibility blues" that black women may suffer from, particularly *other mothers*, who are rarely mentioned in scholarship, and even less in religious scholarship.

### **1.3 Purpose of Study**

In an effort to counter black women's "invisibility blues," this study seeks to provide a space for *other mothers* from diverse backgrounds in religious discourse. This study explores the ways in which *other mothers* interact with parishioners, who may be children and adults. I looked at what characterizes each woman as an *other mother*, the ways they exude maternal spiritual guidance,



and their overall agency in their place of worship. Using womanist theology as a theoretical framework, this study conducts a qualitative, feminist phenomenological research study. I used focus groups and utilize semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to understand the concept of *other mothering* through a religious lens. As a result, I hope that this study will help bring attention to black *maternal ministers* and their roles as *other mothers* and the ways in which they utilize their motherly roles to provide spiritual guidance to congregants. This study also seeks to acknowledge the different forms of oppression and lived experiences of these women, which may include and extend beyond race, class, and gender struggles.

#### **1.4 Significance of Study**

In biblical and theological texts, blacks women's' presence has been minimal. They have not been adequately recognized as contributors to black religious scholarship or highly accredited with maintaining the functionality of black churches. Black women have been positioned outside of the pulpit, a place deemed for black men. However, black women have exercised their scriptural teachings and faith-based lessons without a sanctified stage. Outside of the mother's ministry, there are *other mothers* who preach and speak "God-talk" within and beyond the pulpit. While many of these women have children, a great number of them have never had children, yet they still contain motherly instincts and use their mother role to instill religious principles. This study is significant because it seeks to shed light on the contributions that ordinary laywomen, elders, and clergywomen contribute to black religious communities through their *maternal ministry*. Research over the last forty years by womanist theologians and even some black male theologians has begun to integrate black women's stories into religious talk, addressing the tri-dimensionality of their racist, sexist, and classist oppression. This study not only seeks to add to the existing literature on black women's roles in the church but also seeks to add to the current discourse surrounding black women's unacknowledged duties. I hope to give *maternal ministers* a new voice, a voice that hasn't been heard or at least provide a new interpretive lens to studying church mothers. This study is

significant to African American Studies because it identifies an arena in the black community where black mothers foster the religious development of both children and adults. Black mothers have constantly been blamed for the hardships and stigmas attached to the black community. However, this study positions black *other mothers* in admirable spaces and reveals their contributions to religious development instead of blaming them for the plight of a racial group.

### **1.5 Nature of Study**

This study utilizes a qualitative research design. Qualitative methodology provides the most suitable research method to capture and understand the lived religious experiences of *other mothers* and their ministry in diverse religious communities. In an effort to explore the meaning of what mothering and ministry when viewed in connection to each other means to the participants, it is important to incorporate the participants stories' and document and describe them through an interpretive lens, which will then lend themes and patterns. The participants ultimately brought their own experiences, thoughts, and voices to the study. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2011) as cited by Creswell (2013), "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.44). Such an open and cooperative relationship between the participants and the researcher will allow for honest in-depth discussions. Through the use of focus groups and semi-structured interviews, I was able to delve into the complexities of these women's religious lives and learn of the participants' diverse views on *maternal ministry*.

### **1.6 Research Questions:**

- Where and how does *other mothering* function in black churches?
- How are the everyday experiences of laywomen, elders, and clergywomen in the church portrayed through the role of mothering?
- Do women's ideas about their faith and the bible impact their ministry?
- Are women empowered by their maternal ministerial roles?

## 1.7 Theoretical Framework

When examining the importance of black women in the black church, it is important to utilize a liberation theology that thoroughly explores the complexities of black women's roles in everyday life, which intersects with their overall racist, sexist, and classist oppression. This paper will utilize womanist theology to examine black women's religious lives at Mt. Olive and Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Big Bethel). This study takes on a feminist approach to the research, because this is the only research method offered by Creswell that centers women's lived experiences. However, the chosen theory is womanist theology, for this theory is the most suitable for this study and most representative of the participants' experiences. It also fills the gaps of feminist theory. According to Phillips (2006):

Feminism is that critical perspective and social movement that revolves around the eradication of sexism, the dismantling of patriarchy, and the elimination of violence against women. Black feminism is a Black expression of feminism animated by womanist idea and conveyed through womanist frames. Stated differently, womanism is what's left when feminism is lifted off Black feminism...womanism can infuse any critical perspective or social movement- feminism is not the sole instrument through which it speaks. In the end, womanism is a social change-perspective that focuses on harmonizing and coordinating difference, ending all forms of oppression and dehumanization, and promoting well-being and commonweal for all people, regardless of identity, social address, or origins (p.xxxvi).

Black Christian women were one of the first groups of people to use womanist theory to frame their discussion of a more liberative theology. Thus, they took advantage of the freedoms informed by womanist thought. Phillips (2006) explains that theology "was the first discipline to really latch on to the womanist idea and develop womanism as a unique and freestanding perspective" (p.xliv). Womanist theology emerged as a response to sexism in black theologies and racism in feminist

theologies (Thomas, 1998). Those associated with this theological perspective include Katie Cannon, Emilie Townes, Jacqueline Grant, Delores Williams, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Kelly Brown Douglas, Renita Weems, and most recently Monica Coleman, just to name a few. Linda Thomas, also a womanist theologian, defines herself and these women as a body of women who comprise over fifty percent of the black church in America, as seminary professors, as pastors, as prayer warriors, as *mothers*, as daughters, as lovers, and most importantly, as sisters (Thomas, 1998).

Womanist theology arises from Alice Walker's use of the term "womanist," a term she uses in her essay collection, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. Cannon notes, that the objective of womanist theologians is to use Walker's four part definition of this term as a "critical, methodological framework for challenging inherited traditions for their collusion with androcentric patriarchy as a catalyst in overcoming oppressive situations through revolutionary acts of rebellion (Cannon; 1995, p. 23). Within this definition, Walker defines a womanist as one who acts womanish or who is a black feminist, a woman who loves women sexually and non-sexually, loves music, food, dance, and black culture, and finally describes a womanist to a feminist as purple is to lavender (Walker, 1983). For womanist theologians, the task of womanist theology is to critique male centered traditions within theological and biblical discourse. Utilizing this definition, theologians have begun to reject their oppressive roles in the church and society, recasting the meanings of this term through a religious lens.

The actual meaning and task of womanist theology speaks to its relevance to black women at Mt. Olive and Big Bethel. Womanist theology is "the critical reflection upon black women's place in the world that God has created and takes seriously black women's experience as human beings who are made in the image of God" (Thomas;1998, p.1). This theory becomes beneficial to utilize when examining the ministry of black women at the two aforesaid churches, which I have deemed to be both traditional and untraditional. Womanist theology's tasks include examining the construction of womanhood as it relates to religious concepts, revealing the concealed stories of

marginalized African American women, and assessing the positive and negative images of the church, community, and wider society (Coleman, 2008). Such tasks reveal the significance of this theological perspective.

In order to practice womanist theology, and bring black women's experiences into religious discourse, there are several ideas to consider. Womanist theologians may study spirituals and conjure, personal narratives, women's experiences in slavery, syncretic black religiosity, African American fiction and poetry, 19<sup>th</sup> century black women leaders, church doctrine, and gospel music (Coleman; 2008). Delores Williams offers a method to practicing womanist theology that will assist in further developing the theory. Christian womanist theology must be informed by four elements, which include a multi-dialogical intent, a liturgical intent, a didactic intent, and a commitment both to reason and to the validity of female imagery and metaphorical language in the construction of theological statements (Williams, 2006). Each element ultimately serves a different purpose. A multi-dialogical intent will allow for womanist theologians to engage in discourse and action with diverse communities (social, political, religious) who are concerned with human survival and enhancing the quality of life for the oppressed (Williams, 2006). A liturgical intent will allow womanist theology to be practiced and relevant in the church and will critique the traditional practices of the black church (Williams, 2006). A didactic intent contends that womanist theologians should be teachers and impart new insights to Christians (Williams, 2006). Finally, metaphorical language and female imagery will allow black women's history, culture, and experiences to be incorporated into womanist theological statements (Williams, 2006).

I used womanist theology to discuss the ways maternal identity is constructed at the two churches and to understand how the mothers at these churches have acted as ministers through their mothering roles. While assessing their importance, I have looked at the ways in which womanist theology allows for an examination of the construction of gender in the church and how black women have raised, nurtured, and disciplined children and adults to be Christians. Mothering

can be an oppressive task for black women, for they are responsible for the upkeep of the black community. However, mothering can also be a dignified as well as a liberating task for black women.

## 1.8 Definitions of Terms

### *Other mothering*

- According to Patricia Hill Collins (2008), “Biological mothers, or blood mothers, are expected to care for their children. But African and African-American communities have also recognized that vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, other mothers- women who assist blood mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities-traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood” (Troester; 1984, p.192).
- According to Arlene Edwards (2000) who cites James (1993) other mothering is defined “as [the] acceptance of responsibility for a child not one’s own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal” (p.88).

### *Maternal Ministry*

- A ministry in which women impart religious lessons and spiritual guidance to parishioners through their maternal/mothering characteristics.

## 1.9 Assumptions and Biases

My assumptions and biases stem from my personal experiences with *other mothering*. I came to assume that like the women at Mt. Olive, the women at Big Bethel take on mothering roles that touch the lives of parishioners. I assumed that many of these women might see their roles in the church as motherly and ministerial, while many of these women may see themselves as simply being a faithful servant of God. Due to the influence that *other mothers* have had over my life, I grew extremely passionate about the topic. Therefore, I have exercised reflexivity, by remaining aware of

the ways in which my background has promoted my interests in the study, yet remaining open to gaining new insights from the research (Creswell, 2013).

### **1.10 Scope, Limitations and Delimitations**

This study will utilize a population consisting of women who are 35 years of age and older, African American, and women who have been a member of Mt. Olive or Big Bethel for five years or more. For the purposes of the study, it was important to choose women who have been members of these churches for at least five years, a length of time that speaks to their commitment to the church. Due to the time constraints, I only sought out 14 participants to fully engage in the lived experiences of these women in a thorough, timely, and efficient manner. With more time, I would have been able to enlarge the sample and retrieve even more diverse responses and methods of *other mothering*. I chose not to extensively examine literature on church mothers, who may also be considered *other mothers*, because their roles have been acknowledged. I also chose to conduct interviews in addition to focus groups to expand my data retrieval and to pinpoint 2 women who stood out from the rest of participants, investing more time in learning their individual stories.

### **1.11 Summary**

This chapter introduced the proposed research study, its purpose and the overall significance of the study to the African American community and African American Studies discipline. It also provided clarity on terminology that may be unfamiliar to readers and addressed the assumptions, biases, scope, limitations, and delimitations of the study. The next chapter includes a literature review on black women's roles in the black church, their invisibility in biblical and theological studies, black women's reactions to gender and power dynamics in the church, and the role of motherhood in the church.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the literature for this chapter comes from biblical and theological texts. Also the literature was gathered from databases including JSTOR and EBSCOhost. This literature review is divided into six sections. The first section examines the black church as more than a religious environment, the second section is a discussion on theological discourse, and the third section looks at black women in biblical and theological discourse. In addition, the fourth section examines black women's reaction to their neglect, section four examines gender roles in the black church, and the final section looks at mothering in the black church and *other mothering* and community mothering.

In my attempts to understand the ways in which *other mothering* functions in black religious environments, I ran into several challenges. *Other mothering* is a fairly new idea in the African American Studies discipline, although it is an extension of community mothering. Thus, the literature on *other mothering* is scarce. Also, literature on the black church has primarily focused on the church's role in helping liberate those of African descent from their oppressive realities, in which one may see prominent leaders utilizing theological discourse to engage in such a task. Black women have reacted to their invisibility in such texts and discussions, which have neglected their contributions and roles in religious environments, by critiquing patriarchy. However, in regards to social mothering in the church, I was able to salvage little information outside of the examination of mothers' ministries in the church. Thus, I was forced to examine *other mothering* and black religious experiences as almost mutually exclusive and then in juxtaposition to one another, in which I came to coin the idea of *maternal ministry*.

### 2.1 The Black Church: More than Just a Religious Institution

The black church as an institution has promoted racial uplift and social justice, and liberatory messages have been integrated into religious teachings. Although the black church is more than an institution of social relevance to black men, black women receive less attention than their male counterparts. Thus, this institution has not equally addressed the concerns of black



women as it has black men. This section of my literature review will act as a framework for describing the multiple roles of the church in the black community. As a result, it will inform my discussion of black women's oppression in this institution, hence drawing attention to the need for a nuanced discussion of black mothering. It is not enough to describe the black church as a religious institution, for it serves multiple purposes in the black community, outside of its devout mission to save troubled souls and provide a dwelling place for Christian worship. Ward (2005) posits, Black churches are of central importance to the black community and its culture. For some, it is a place to worship but for others, it may be a community center, a place to develop familial relationships, a safe haven, and a learning facility, specifically for those understanding the meaning and responsibility of being in leadership positions. This facility addresses various communal needs which demonstrates its versatility and complex nature. Taylor, Lincoln, and Chatters (2005) substantiate the aforementioned claim, for they contend that church network systems may be useful outlets to accommodate the needs of African Americans. Though the church has many functions, research has extensively proven that the black church has acted as both a support system and the grounds on which political activism in the black community has grown and been nourished.

Studies by Ward (2005), Taylor, Lincoln, and Chatters (2005), and Walls (1992), shows that much research has been conducted on the black church and the ways in which it serves as a support system to the community. Ward (2005) notes, church relationships are important among blacks of all classes and backgrounds, for they promote religious socialization and strong support networks. Ward posits the church as an influential and supportive institution in the black community, claims substantiated by Taylor, Lincoln, and Chatters (2005). This study by these researchers serves as an adequate lens to look at the ways in which African Americans have sought out the church as a place of refuge. Taylor, Lincoln, and Chatters (2005) note, "churches and religious participation have played a particularly important role in addressing various supportive needs in African American communities through their involvement in health and social welfare initiatives, community

organizing, educational development, and civic endeavors” (p. 502). Walls (1992), further substantiates this notion in her study, in which she examines the role of the church in the lives of older adults. Walls (1992) conducts an exploratory study of adults ages 65 to 104 and measures “social support, religiosity, well-being, health status, and functional health status” (p.33). Similar to Walls; Taylor, Lincoln, and Chatters (2005) look at indicators of subjective closeness that inform church support networks and how characteristics of church networks are associated with support provisions.

In addition to being a source of support, the black church has served as the platform on which black activists have acted as leaders, taking on the task of reaping civil rights for African Americans. Harris (1994) examines the relationship between religion and political activism in the black community, finding there to be positive links between black religiosity and political activism. Black activists often use the church to address political and socio-economic issues in the black community. Fitzgerald and Spohn (2005) extend the assertions of Harris as they discuss the ways in which the church facilitated activism. They cite McAdam (1996), to justify claims that the black church played a major role in the Civil Rights Movement as shown by the religious and biblical teachings imparted by Civil Rights leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who advocated for human rights and equality. Secondly, Fitzgerald and Spohn (2005) who cite McAdam (1982) and Morris (1981,1984) explain how the church became an essential tool in organizing blacks to become involved in the movement “by providing the organizational and institutional resources necessary for boycotts, sit-ins and other protest activities” (p.1016). Black churches often provided the resources for such freedom movements to take place. As religious messages were translated to congregants by political figures, such as King, there would often be a political uproar among blacks to challenge society’s injustices. Upon reviewing literature that examined the influence that such leaders as Dr. King had over the black community, it became important to understand the content of theological discourse and the ways in which it may or may not be liberating for the black

community in helping its members overcome adverse situations and oppressive realities.

Seemingly, the theology of Dr. King and other black male theologians would not assist in eradicating black Christian's womens' oppression.

## **2.2 Theological Discourse**

James E. Cone and Gustavo Gutierrez have developed theologies that speak to liberating the oppressed community through the Gospel of Christ. These two theologians began developing liberation theologies almost simultaneously. The term, "liberation theology" was first used by Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian Roman Catholic priest in 1973 (Berryman, n.d., p.7). Liberation theology is "a school of thought among Latin American Catholics according to which the Gospel of Christ demands that the church concentrate its efforts on liberating the people of the world from poverty" (Berryman, n.d., p.8). Cone, who is considered the father of black liberation theology, was developing a theology to reflect the religious experiences of black people in the 1970s. Biblical scholars and black theologians within the African American Studies discipline utilize religious teachings to examine socio-political forces that inform the oppressive realities of blacks. As previously asserted, the African American religious experience is one in which faith is merged with liberation. When these two ideas unite, religion ultimately becomes a source of refuge or a source of strength to those who may or may not find themselves in adverse situations. James E. Cone (1970), posits, "The function of theology is that of analyzing the meaning of that liberation for the oppressed community so that they can know that their struggle for the political, social, and economic justice is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ" (p.11). However, when Christianity is viewed as purely applicable to the lives of one ethnic group, it does not promote the theme of liberation. Initially, if one were to consider the ways in which African Americans have suffered as a racially oppressed group, it would appear as though Christianity has not worked in the favor of African Americans or even served as a means of alleviation for their hardships. Yet, black theologians and biblical scholars have challenged such claims, by reinterpreting biblical meanings

in light of the black experience to challenge the idea that Christianity is purely Eurocentric. In creating a theology that speaks to the lived experiences of the oppressed, it is important that these theologies provide spaces for blacks of different classes, genders and creeds. Yet, upon reviewing the literature, I noticed the utter neglect of black women's lived experiences.

### **2.3 Locating Spaces for Black Women in Biblical and Theological Discourse**

Cone (2008) and Wilmore (1998) both take on radical approaches in their efforts to denounce mainstream White Christianity. In essence, Wilmore lays the foundation for Cone's theological perspective and God-talk through his historical analysis and interpretation of black religion. In Cone's (1970) edition of *A Black Theology of Liberation*, he denounces racist theology that fails to fully legitimize the black experience in its religious traditions. Cone offers a very nuanced argument through both his advocacy of Black Nationalist ideals, as they are applicable to studying Christianity and his criticism of these ideals as they relate to understanding the image of God. This text contained several shortcomings, which Cone relays in his 2008 edition. Cone (2008) critiques his failure to discuss sexism in the black community, his failure to provide a global analysis of oppression and class analysis of oppression, and finally he critiques his own reliance on the theology of Karl Barth. Despite Cone's recognition of his shortcomings, he still fails to adequately discuss the oppression of black women and does not adequately include them into his liberatory proclamation to the oppressed. Ultimately, women still appear to assume a position that is secondary to black men, though less obvious. Wilmore (1998) does not focus specifically on theology; but rather examines the dualistic nature of the black church. He explores the overall radical and conservative nature of the black church that has developed throughout the centuries and provides readers with a historical account of this evolution. Wilmore (1998) cites Kelly Miller, author of "Radicalism and Conservatism" (n.d.), who contends, "Radical and conservative Negroes agree as to the end in view, but differ as to the most effective means of attaining it. The difference is not essentially one of principle or purpose, but point of view" (p.ix). Despite these differing

perspectives, their perceptions represent a convergence of the ideologies that have existed in the black church.

Black women's presence in both works is minimal if existent at all. In Cone's first edition, he dedicates an entire section to assess "Man in Black Theology." In his most recent text, this chapter title is changed to the "Human Being in Black Theology." It would have been more beneficial and liberating to simply add a chapter that examines black women in theology, because simply transitioning from man to human being does not acknowledge the specificity of black women's tri-dimensional oppression. When Cone (2008) began composing this piece, he explains, "It was clear to me that what was needed was a *fresh start* in theology, a new way of doing it that would arise out of the black struggle for justice and in no way would be dependent upon the approval of white academics" (p.191). To commence this new start in theology, Cone (2008) explains how leaders, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. have demonstrated the role that religion has played in the black community. Cone (2008) notes, Dr. King "preached black liberation in the light of Jesus Christ and thus aroused the spirit of freedom in the black community" (p.37). King sought to advance freedom to the black community through his theological talk and a practice of non-violence. Malcolm X, though more radical than King, shared his liberatory sentiments. Cone (2008) recalls a quote from Malcolm X that was of great influence to him as he composed his work, which reads, "I believe in a religion that believes in freedom. Anytime I have to accept a religion that won't let me fight a battle for my people, I say to hell with that religion" (p. xii). Although Cone chose two pillars of the freedom movement whose philosophies both served the black community in different ways, Cone's support of black women became questionable, for their contributions are completely overlooked.

Similarly, Wilmore ignores the contributions of women. Wilmore examines the beginnings of black radicalism, which inform black liberation theology. In chapter four of *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, Wilmore solely discusses the revolts of three men, who relied upon scripture and

their religious faith to attain freedom for their race and do so as radicals, as they rebel against white supremacist authority. Wilmore examines the stories of Gabriel, the black Samson, Denmark Vesey, the Methodist conspirator, and Nat Turner, the Baptist prophet. Each of these men led a slave insurrection because they felt themselves to be ordained by God to deliver their race from the bondage of slavery. Wilmore (1998) describes Gabriel to be influenced by biblical figure, Samson, in Judges 15:14-20 and ordained by God to revolt against the Philistine slaveholders. Similarly, Vesey looked to scripture for his calling to lead an insurrection in South Carolina. Wilmore (2008) posits, Vesey was influenced by the story of the children of Israel who crossed the Jordan, finding their way to the promise land. Vesey ultimately saw it as his obligation to destroy whites in varying places in the city in an effort to attain both ecclesiastical and political liberty. Finally, Nat Turner's revolt in the South Hampton County was based on scriptures and visions he received from a higher power. According to Wilmore (1998), "Nat is reported to have said that God had appointed that night for the black race to be delivered from slavery, and that the war should be waged upon a Christian basis" (p. 94). The radicalism of these three generals provides the framework for studying black liberation theology. Each revolt was based on scripture and the desire to liberate the oppressed from bondage, which sets the foundation for Cone's theology. However, missing from both Cone and Wilmore's texts, are discussions of black women's radicalism and the ways in which they have contributed to the understanding of black religious history and theological interpretation.

Scholars have examined Sojourner's Truth's calling to liberate blacks, which she practiced using biblical characters and scripture (Gilkes, 2001; Ross, 2003). Similarly, Harriet Tubman has been characterized as someone who used her religiosity/spirituality to liberate her people from bondage (Humez, 1993; Williams 2006). Not only did these women come before Dr. King, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, and other men mentioned by Cone, they can be considered generals in the Lord's army as Gabriel, Vesey, and Nat Turner, despite their intent to refrain from violence. Both women may be considered messianic figures in that they received callings from a higher power to rescue

those in servitude. Gilkes (2001) contends, Truth felt as though she was called by God to “sojourn over the land to preach the truth concerning slavery” (p. 110). Truth began to perform antislavery speeches, and in these speeches, she advocated for women’s rights and the abolition of slavery. Through her use of biblical characters and scripture, her antislavery propositions were to be liberatory to the men and women of her race. Truth’s tactics were unlike those of Gabriel, Vesey, and Turner in that she did not use violence to assert her positions. Ross (2003) asserts, Truth said, “I carry no weapon: the Lord will [preserve]...me without weapons” (p. 20). Yet, this does not make her any less radical. For like the three generals mentioned by Wilmore, she found herself in biblical texts. Truth’s reliance on her religious faith during her fight for justice and freedom are claims made by Gilkes and further substantiated by Ross (2003). Ross (2003) explains that Truth compared herself to David in battle with the Philistines. In the face of adversity, she still continued to fight non-combatively against the injustices of slavery because of her divine calling to be a leader over her people.

Similarly, although Tubman is popularized for her role in freeing thousands of slaves by way of the Underground Railroad, her use of the bible and religion are often minimally discussed. Williams (2006) explains that Tubman went into the spirit before her liberation missions and claimed her strength for liberation activity came from this way of meeting God” (p. 123). In addition, Tubman is often called the Moses of her people. Like Moses, she guides those of her race out of captivity. Humez (1993) extends the claims of Williams by explaining how Tubman appropriated the Exodus story to justify her leadership of her freedom movement. Like the aforementioned male generals, Tubman experienced a divine calling to react against the injustices of slavery. Humez (1993) refers to Tubman’s relationship with god as “unmediated contact with the divine” and “prophetic foresight” (p. 174). Though Tubman carried a gun, she did not resort to horrendous acts of violence to meet her goals of liberation. Yet, she was still radical, for despite the dangers of death and recapture, Tubman remained courageous in an effort to extinguish the plight

of her people. Since scholars have recognized the efforts of Tubman and Truth as freedom fighters, who paved the way for leaders such as Dr. King and Malcolm X, biblical and theological texts that have been written by scholars such as Cone and Wilmore are not complete or fully encompassing of the black experience without mention of these women or other women who have contributed to the liberation struggle. If these texts are the foundations on which liberation tactics are being studied and based, it is important that black women are given adequate recognition.

#### **2.4 Black Women React to their Neglect**

Black women have begun to critique liberation theologies, particularly black liberation theology for its failure to incorporate black women. Williams (1990) responds to Cone's theology in "James Cone's Liberation: Twenty Years Later." Williams raises concerns about women's place in this theological phenomenon. Though Williams' believes that Cone's text was one of the most revolutionary texts in theological history, she wonders whether Cone will stand beside women instead of in front of them. Williams (1990) writes:

Hence, would Cone's claim that 'sexism dehumanizes and kills' translate into taking a stand with black women in opposing those black males in the academic world who, in sexist fashion, might try to prevent black women from publishing theological positions that challenge the publications of black male theologians? Part of me says Cone's words would translate into a supportive stand with black women; another part wonders if he could withstand the alienation from some important black male peers that such a stand might incur (p.192).

Williams (1990) ultimately fears that black women will always be subjected to black males and whites' approval for black women's "visibility, inclusion, and equality" in Christian theology (p.192). Other womanist theologians have raised similar concerns and spoke out even more ardently, critically acknowledging the shortcomings of black liberation theology.



Thomas (1998) and Grant (1982, 1995) are two of several womanist theologians who critique black liberation theology for its exclusion of black women in its liberation ethic. In critiquing black theology, womanist theologians seek a more just black liberation theology that will unveil facts about the predicament of black women within oppressed groups (Grant, 1982). Grant (1982) explains that this should be an easy task for male theologians because “Black women are the poorest of the poor, the most oppressed of the oppressed, [and] their experiences provide a most fruitful context for doing Black theology” (p. 146). In another manuscript, Grant (1995) notes that it has been assumed that black theology has provided black women with no place in its enterprise and allows men to speak for women, ideas which arise out of a male centered culture. Thus, issues such as sexism have been ignored. Although racism and sexism are interrelated, in male dominated circles, racism takes precedence over all other oppressions in theological talk. Thus, womanist theology pays attention to the everyday realities of black women, a claim made by Grant, and substantiated by Thomas who notes, womanist theology, “fosters the visibility of women in God-talk, where black liberation theology has fallen short” (Thomas; 1998, p.1). Thomas (1998) explains that placing women within religious discourse informs a new interpretive lens of the bible and contributes to the reconstruction and crafting of biblical and theological knowledge, ultimately denouncing the exclusion of women. Thus, womanist theology may serve as an adequate lens to assess black women’s tri-dimensional oppression and to explore their roles in the church and the ways in which they have been minimized in relation to those of men. Thus, a discussion on traditional gender roles in the church is necessary to appropriate the need for a theory that is liberatory for all black women.

## **2.5 Gender Roles in the Black Church**

Studies exploring gender roles in the black church have primarily argued that traditionally black men have assumed dominance in the church while black women have been known to take on subservient roles. Black women’s oppression and invisibility in the larger society and black

community has often matched their invisibility in religious institutions. According to Gilkes (2001), “Black women and men share a religious life...but they often disagree on the degree to which the patriarchy that is normative in the dominant society should be reproduced in their lives” (p.7). Many scholars have defined such binary divisions between men and women in the church as it relates to church leadership. The image of leadership in the black church is majorly male (Grant; 1982, Lincoln & Mamiya ;1990). Within a community, where racism and classism has encompassed the black experience, it is assumed that the church is a place where ministry, which may be used as a tool for uplift in the black community, sees no gender; yet, this has not been the case. The status of black women in the wider community appears to compare largely to their status in the church (Grant; 1982, Lincoln & Mamiya ;1990).

Historically, women have been conditioned to take on supportive roles in the church instead of ministerial roles. Murray and Harrison (1981) cites Williams (1974), who reports that women were allowed to teach but not to preach and that their social status in the church was determined by their affiliation with church organizations that were comprised of women (p.118). Thus, women did not have a status among men, whose statuses were informed by their leadership positions or roles as ministers. Grant (1982) substantiates the aforementioned claim by exploring the monopolization of the ministry by black men. Black church fathers, though advocates for human rights, neglected black women’s gender rights. Grant, who frames one of her particular assessments of gender roles in the church around the early nineteenth century, notes that Rev. Richard Allen, believed that it was unjust for both free and enslaved blacks to have restrictions on their religious worship (Grant; 1982, p.142). They should be granted the freedom to worship wherever they want and whenever they wanted to. However, this same reverend did not see the injustice in placing women in the pews and abstaining from granting them ordination (Grant; 1982, p.142). Women’s calling into the ministry has been constantly questioned. Green (1995) provides statistical evidence to extend claims made by Grant, Murray, and Harrison. Despite women making up “between sixty-

six and eighty percent of the membership in mainline Black denominations today, it is estimated that they comprise less than five percent of the official leadership positions” (Green; 1995 p. 36).

Despite these unjust practices, it is clear that black women maintained the upkeep of this institution, for without them, the functionality of the black church is questionable. Grant, Lincoln and Mamiya extend this claim. These scholars acknowledge the importance of black women in the church. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) discuss the multiple roles black women take on in the church which include being “evangelists, missionaries, stewardesses, deaconesses, lay readers, writers on religious subjects, Sunday school teachers, musicians, choir members and directors of vacation bible schools” (p.275). Yet, despite their overall significance, their oppression has been predicated upon gender binaries in which their potential ordination was controversial and their male superiors constantly questioned their “calling” to minister. Thus, even their liberation within the confines of the church was limited.

## **2.6 Mothering in the Black Church**

Literature on mothering in the church has primarily focused on church mothers or distinguished elders, who are members of motherboards. *Other mothering* outside of this realm has been minimally discussed. Church mothers have maintained important roles in black churches (Butler; 2007, Gilkes, 2001). Though similar to community mothers, their roles slightly differ. These women are often described as elders and held in the highest respect. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes (2001), who examines the shared powers among church mothers in different denominational settings, explains that church mothers are more than elders and models to younger adults, they are important to both older and younger generations (p.68). Their importance also stems from their ability to provide moral and spiritual guidance to congregants as well as from their identities as spiritual women who maintain authority within “*nearly* autonomous and well-organized parallel women’s worlds” (p.68). Church mothers take on varying roles outside of the traditional mother figure. In many instances, they are proclaimed preachers, church founders, church leaders, and

bishops (Gilkes, 2001, p.68). The aforementioned list is inadequate in providing a summative portrayal of church mothers' roles in the church. Butler (2007) extends Gilke's list by indicating that church mothers act as "advisors to the pastors, as disciplinarians and leaders to wayward church members, and as spiritual avatars to the congregation" (p.12). Within each denomination, church mothers may reign at different levels of power. Traditionally in the Baptist tradition, these mothers operate under primarily male leadership.

Many scholars have explored the concept of *other mothering*, yet few have examined the ways in which this form of mothering functions in the church with the exception of Teresa Frye Brown. Brown (2000) examines the relationship between family, church, and community. Contextualizing the idea of other mothering historically first, Brown (2000) writes that African American women have endured "forced immigration, a deadly Middle Passage, government-sanctioned enslavement, sharecropping, a Great Migration, Jim Crow, and institutional slavery; [yet they] are often overlooked by progeny who only know twenty-first century materialism, tentative entitlement, and superficial equality" (p. 9). These women may be considered ancestral mothers due to their long endurance of social injustice and eventual perseverance. After this historical discussion of black women's vitality, Brown discusses the importance of grandmothers and *other mothers* and their transmission of spiritual beliefs. Reflecting on her personal experiences, Brown learned the importance of a healthy spiritual relationship from grandmothers and *other mothers*. Brown (2000) states, "I learned the secrets of a productive, liberative, Christian life through precept and example, direct chastisement and instruction, indirect modeling, telling stories, humming songs, discussing the last sermon, and sharing family history" (p. 11). Additionally, Brown has witnessed the relationships between Christian women and younger people and how such relationships foster positive developmental and religious instruction. Brown (2000) notes, "The strength gained when a 'grandmother or othermother' gently lays on hands, or holds a younger person through tears, or soothes fears with words of faith cannot be replaced with

psychological or sociological analysis of the situation” (p.13). Maternal figures may impart and constantly reiterate religious mantras that inform the ways in which young people develop with religious traditions and beliefs. Examples offered by Brown reveal many of the sayings that grandmothers and *other mothers* instill into developing youth. The most important sayings passed down from other mothers as reiterated by Brown is “God don’t like ugly,” and that “God is everywhere you go”(13). These two sayings do not begin to reflect the importance of the God-talk translated by other mothers to youth. Yet, the abovementioned mantras do contribute to both religious development and one’s maturation. Brown provides an extensive discussion of the ways in which African American women pass down spiritual values. At first glance, I neglected to take into consideration *cross mothering* in the church, family and community. Whereas, Brown does an extensive study and historical and theoretical analysis in each of these arenas, this study focuses more closely on the church, and the discussion of mothering in the family and community came up sporadically during the focus groups and interviews and therefore became integrated into the discussion and analysis by way of the participants. Thus, with more time, the researcher can more closely explore *intersectional other mothering* in the church, family, and community as Brown has.

Additionally, other scholars such as Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Patricia Hill Collins, and Arlene F. Edwards have explored the concept of *other mothering*, which ultimately stems from community mothering. Black motherhood extends beyond its traditional and biological associations (Gilkes; 2001, Collins; 2000, Edwards; 2000). *Other mothering* comes from West African practices of communality. The period of enslavement called for *other mothers* and childcare became the assumed task of black women in addition to their other tasks. Edwards (2000) explains that due to the instability of familial structures during this period, black women often found themselves caring for children that were not their own, when the biological mothers of enslaved children were sold to different plantation owners (p.59). The importance of women in West Africa as mothers is a claim by Edwards that is substantiated by Gilkes. Gilkes (2001) explains that in several West African

societies, “women were persons in their own right with responsibilities and privileges not derived from husbands and fathers” (p.64). One of West African women’s most important roles was that of a mother, for this role was far more important than that of wife (Gilkes, 2001, p.65). Thus, this tradition of mothering, community mothering, and *other mothering* can be traced back to West African practices.

In linking this mothering tradition to the United States, there is still this steadfast reliance on black mothers outside of the biological associations. Collins (2000) notes, “In many African American communities, fluid and changing boundaries often distinguish biological mothers from other women who care for children” (p.192). Mothering may come in the form of a grandmother, sister, aunt, or cousin. Collins (2000) cites Stack (1974) who categorizes these maternal figures as “fictive kin” (p.193). African American communities have functioned in such a way that there is a responsibility within the community to care for your neighbor’s child. *Other mothers* not only help offer support to children but assist blood mothers who do not wish to be mothers (Collins, 2000). Edwards (2000) validate Collins’ claims and further extends them by discussing *other mothering* in terms of community mothering and how motherhood functions in the religious community. Edwards (2000) discusses church mothers and civil rights activist women as two examples of mothering as does Gilkes (2001), but Edwards provides more discussion of *other mothering*, where previous literature has fallen short of doing. Edwards (2000) posits, “Work conducted by church mothers centered on teaching Sunday school, conducting home visits, caring for the sick, and missionary work” (p. 90). They often lend their attention to the community. Despite black women’s varied roles, they were not adequately acknowledged for their contributions to the community and church. Edwards (2000) cites Harley (1982) who states:

These women took up membership in church women’s groups, female auxiliaries to fraternal orders, and benevolent societies, which often required less affluent lifestyles, less active public roles, and had more practical benefits for their members

than did predominantly middle class reform associations (p.260).

Church mothers are constantly in search of resources to nurture the community, which is symbolic of *other mothering*. Women who were civil rights activists have also acted as *other mothers*. Women who have taken on such roles are Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Rosa Parks as described by Edwards. Edwards explains that these women were reared in the church, learned the importance of faith-based activism, as well as the perseverance of the black community. Thus, their maternal and spiritual guidance is to ensure the survival of the community. The aforementioned idea is substantiated by Clark-Hine (1986) as cited by Edwards, who states:

The creation of educational, health care, and recreational institutions spearheaded by diverse Black women's clubs and voluntary organizations followed no standard pattern. Rather, women launched new projects or worked to transform existing institutions into structures more adequately designed to address the needs of their respective constituencies. Recurring concerns were for education for the young, food, shelter, and clothing for the aged, medical and nursing care for the sick (p. 238).

From the above-mentioned assertion, it is clear that civil rights women and church mothers were classified as community mothers, thus *other mothers*. This literature lays the foundation for my discussion of *other mothering*. Although, *other mothering* is discussed in a religious context, the ways in which these women may have been classified as *maternal ministers* is not discussed, though it may be vaguely implied, which is a gap I seek to fill with my research. Also, literature thus far has failed to explore mothering among women in the church who are not church mothers and may be classified as *other mothers* as well.

## 2.7 Summary

The black church has grown to be one of the most important institutions in the black community. It plays multiple roles in the black community, two of those being its role in offering supportive networks and its role in acting as the platform for black freedom movements. This

facility was to be a liberatory place that frees people from their oppressions and transgressions. However, black women have often been marginalized in the black church, in that they have been forced to assume secondary positions in the church. Leadership has often been prescribed to black men and women's roles are overlooked and given minimal attention. Despite their roles as secretaries, ushers, deaconesses, youth coordinators, etc. they have not been adequately acknowledged as sustainers of this institution. While much research has examined the role that church mothers play in the community as *other mothers*, I have found minimal literature exploring maternal roles among women who are not church mothers or part of the mother's ministry, which is a gap that will be filled by the current study. The next chapter will discuss the methods used to examine *other mothers* as maternal ministers in three predominantly black churches.



### 3 METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to examine the ways that *other mothering* functions in black churches. The idea of *maternal ministry* may be considered a phenomenon in religious environments. This chapter will discuss the research design chosen for the research study and its appropriateness. In addition, an overview of the participants and the selection process will be discussed. Finally, the procedures, methods of analysis, reliability, validity, biases and assumptions will be discussed. The research questions are as follows:

- Where and how does *other mothering* function in black churches?
- How are the everyday experiences of laywomen, elders, and clergywomen in the church portrayed through the role of mothering?
- Do women's ideas about their faith and the bible impact their ministry?
- Are women empowered by their maternal ministerial roles?

#### 3.1 Research Design

This research utilizes a qualitative, exploratory feminist phenomenological research approach. This approach will allow me to examine the black women's experiences as *other mothers* and/or *maternal ministers*, assessing the ways in which they provide spiritual guidance to parishioners and today's youth by way of their traditional church duties. A feminist research procedure "centers on and makes problematic women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations (Creswell; 2013, p. 29). The goal of this study is to give voice to a group of women and a concept that has gone understudied. Feminist research "correct[s] both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position"(Creswell; 2013, p. 29). Within this assumption, the researcher will take a phenomenological approach to this qualitative inquiry. This approach is most appropriate for this study because it allows me to examine a phenomenon among black women that has gone unacknowledged outside the traditional study of church mothers. According to Creswell (2013), "A

phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon "(p. 76). The goal of this study is to examine a group of black maternal figures that commonly combine mothering with teaching/preaching to convey messages about religious truths. It is also important to note that participants in a phenomenological study provide the researcher with experiences of the same concept, in which the researcher is to "develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals," thus arriving at patterns, and essentially, themes (Creswell, 2013, p.77). The existing literature on *other mothers'* roles in religious contexts has been scarce, which proves this population to be understudied. Many of the studies I reviewed were historical, reflective, or theoretical and didn't outline a design. Yet, in Arlene Edwards's "Community Mothering: The Relationship Between Mothering and The Community Work of Black Women," she does address *other mothering* (community mothers, clubwomen, and church mothers) and does so using a phenomenological approach, which I used in addition to Creswell to inform my research approach. Edwards (2001) cites Reagon (1990) who contends that mothering can be considered a source of data in that it allows researchers to garner an evolving image of the community and its survival. This source of cultural data is important to the field of Black Studies. Edwards (2001) cites James (1993) who explains the importance of understanding the roles of *other mothers* based on three reasons. James (1993) explains:

First understanding the roles will address feelings of importance by indicating historical ways in which black women empowered themselves. Second, understanding allows for reconceptualization of power as a means toward action rather than a commodity. Third, the talents exhibited in analyzing and critiquing transitions and developing workable strategies may be viewed as possible sources for addressing contemporary community needs (p. 92).

While the concept of *maternal ministry* is not a new form of ministry or new component within black religious traditions, it is a fairly new phrase and idea that has gone unnamed. *Other mothering* is historically grounded in slave narratives, a means of power that can never be completely diminished by black males, and it contributes to the development of the black community. In essence, *other mothering* is a newly recognizable phenomenon that will best be studied with a phenomenological approach.

The research questions are centered around examining the ways in which *other mothering* may function outside the roles of church mothers, the everyday lived experiences of *other mothers*, the ways in which the bible and black women's faith impacts their ministry, and whether they are empowered by their maternal role. These research questions unveil the shared experiences of a group of women who may be classified as *maternal ministers*. In order to understand the aforesaid experiences, the data collection method included focus groups and in-depth semi-structured interviews. This method allowed me to bring all the participants together at once and get a collective understanding of their views on *other mothering* and open-ended questions with two of these women allowed me to focus closely on the lived experiences of two women, zeroing on concepts that may have been unmentioned, unclear or minimally discussed during the focus groups.

### **3.2 Participants**

The current study involved 14 participants. The participants identified as female, were African American, 35 years of age or older, and have held membership at Mt. Olive or Big Bethel for at least 5 years. Of the 14 women, 10 are members of Mt. Olive; and 4 are members of Big Bethel. Purposive sampling was utilized to gather a specific sample and snowball sampling where I hoped that there would be a chain reaction, where more participants would sign up for the study who fit the desired profile. I requested permission from these churches' pastors and secretaries to post a notice in the church bulletin informing congregants of the study. The announcement outlined the purpose of the research study, the preferred demographics of participants, and my contact

information, which included an email address and telephone number. I also made an announcement at both churches reiterating what was posted in the church bulletin. Finally, I also reached out to women who were already known to embody characteristics of an *other mother/ maternal minister*.

After prospective candidates expressed interest in the study, I contacted the perspective participants to ensure their participation and eligibility. Food was provided as the incentive for the Mt. Olive focus group while a ten-dollar gift card was provided as the incentive at Big Bethel for those who participated in the study. Participants were informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they had the option to quit the study at any point and time. Participants were ensured that the information in which they provided would remain confidential and before the data collection process commenced, human subjects approval was obtained from Georgia State University.

### **3.3 Procedures**

The focus groups and interviews were conducted between the months of February 2014 and March 2014. A letter was sent to each church outlining the purpose of the research study and requesting permission to include women from each church in the study. Upon receiving permission from the pastor, I made an announcement at Mt. Olive and Big Bethel about the research study, and began recruitment. I contacted the participants thereafter to confirm their interest and eligibility for the study. After these confirmations, I reached out to these women to schedule a time for a focus group to take place at each church. Each focus group lasted no longer than 2 hours. After each focus group, I chose one woman from each group to interview to examine their ministry and role in the church more closely. These interviews lasted no longer than 60 minutes. Before the data collection processes took place, the participants completed a demographic survey and an informed consent document, which discussed the purpose of the study, the participant's requirements, the intended goals of the study, and their option to quit the study at any point in time. These documents along with focus group and interview documents are being kept in a secure location. The focus group and

interview questions were taken from the interview guide. All focus group and the interviews were digitally recorded with both a tape recorder and QuickTime, a recording device on my laptop. Matchless Transcription, a transcription company, transcribed the focus groups while the researcher transcribed the interviews manually. The information provided by the participants can be found in the results section. While the data was coded with the participant's real names to ensure that each response was matched with the correct person, the participant's received pseudonyms that are incorporated in the study's discussion of the data. The researcher chose these pseudonyms. Throughout the duration of this study, there were no risks greater than those in a normal day of life.

The focus groups took place at each of the churches and the interviews took place in the homes and work places of the participants. The focus groups spanned over a two-month period and lasted no longer than 120 minutes. The interviews spanned over a two-month period and lasted no longer than 60 minutes. Due to time constraints, there were no follow up sessions for the focus groups or interviews.

### **3.4 Instrument**

I used focus groups and in-depth semi-structured interviews to answer the four research questions. The focus groups were facilitated by the researcher and posed questions to participants that aided in revealing their everyday life experiences. It helped me to understand the ways they define mothering and ministry and whether these two concepts may be joined together. It also allowed me to delve into the religious experiences of these women, exploring their roles in the church and how they inform their ministry. It helped me understand the ways in which their ministry is informed by their religious faith and finally whether they are empowered by their maternal roles. From the focus groups, I chose one woman from each group with which to conduct an interview. I asked them questions based on themes that arose from the focus groups. I also addressed any unanswered questions from the focus groups or ideas that participants wanted to

expand. Essentially, these one on one interviews contributed to the depth of the data collection process.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using descriptive coding (elemental) for the first cycle coding and pattern coding for the second cycle coding. The purpose of coding is to examine the common themes that emerged from the data. The coded data was beneficial in examining emergent womanist theological concepts that arose in the data collection sessions. Coding is essential to this research study and descriptive and pattern coding was best suited to explore the intricacies of spiritual mothering. According to Saldaña (2013), “Descriptive coding summarizes in a word or short phrase-most often as a noun-the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 88). I explored the transcripts of the interviews, describing the elements of the conversation that were intriguing with a phrase. Afterwards, I used descriptive codes and looked at the patterns among them to develop themes. Saldaña (2013) notes, “Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify a emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (p.210). These two methods of coding were most suitable to capture the essence of the participants’ stories.

### **3.6 Reliability and Validity**

The reliability and validity in this study stems from confirmability. According to Creswell (2013), “Rather than reliability, one seeks dependability that results will be subject to change and instability,” which is why the researcher looked for confirmability which is “established through the auditing of the research process” (p.246). Confirmability emerged as I constantly rechecked the transcriptions for emerging themes and patterns in the focus groups and interviews.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter included a discussion of the design of the study, which consists of the population, sampling methods, and research procedures utilized for the data collection processes.

It also addressed the ways in which the data will be analyzed, as well as reliability and validity. The next chapter will include the findings of the study.

#### 4 FINDINGS

This study examined the ways in which black women in two predominantly African American churches enact *other mothering*. This chapter will explore how the everyday experiences of laywomen, elders, and clergywomen are portrayed through the role of mothering, how ideas about faith and biblical stories inform one's ministry, and whether women are empowered through their ministerial roles. The research questions are as follows:

- Where and how does *other mothering* function in black churches?
- How are the everyday experiences of laywomen, elders, and clergywomen in the church portrayed through the role of mothering?
- Do women's ideas about their faith and the bible impact their ministry?
- Are women empowered by their maternal ministerial roles?

This study utilized a qualitative design with a feminist phenomenological approach and was conducted between the months of February 2014 and March 2014. Within these months, participants were recruited from Mt. Olive and Big Bethel. I reached out to the pastors and secretaries at each church to ask permission to conduct the study. Thereafter I made an announcement at each church and created recruitment flyers. Women reached out to participate and essentially there was a snowball effect where other women voluntarily sought to be involved in the study.

Focus groups and semi-structured one on one interviews were conducted in Atlanta, Georgia for data collection. The focus groups took place in the aforesaid churches and the interviews took place in one of the participant's home and at a Big Bethel Village, a senior citizen home, where one of the participants is the chaplain.

Each participant completed a consent form and a demographic survey before participating in the data collection processes. A total of 14 women women participated in the focus groups and 2



women participated in one on one interviews. All focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

This chapter will discuss the study's findings and will be comprised of four sections. The first section will provide general information and history on the two churches utilized in the study. The next section provides a description of the 14 participants. Participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identity. Data from the focus groups and individual interviews are presented here. Finally, a brief section summarizing the findings is included here.

#### **4.1 Church Histories and Affiliations**

Mt. Olive Baptist Church (Mt. Olive) was founded on March 11, 1885 by Reverend W.R. Clements, pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church (Mt. Zion), as he preached his final sermon at the church's location in 1887. In 1887, the name of the church was changed to Mt. Olive and Dr. C.H. Lyons pastored at Mt. Olive from 1887 until 1889. A committee gathered to negotiate the details on a site of worship, and the site selected was in the Northeast section of the city of Atlanta, at the corner of Harris and Butler Streets. Mt. Olive had 7 pastors before Reverend W.W. Weatherspool came to the church in 1954. On July 11, 1954, a ceremony took place to celebrate the move of Mt. Olive to (then) Gordon Road and Barfield Avenue and on August 28, 1955. Reverend W.W. Weatherspool led a processional from the old location to the new location, which marked the dawn of a new worship experience. The church started off with only fifty-six members and now has over four hundred. The church is currently under the leadership of Reverend J.R. Gibson Sr., who was elected to be pastor on June 2, 2007. As stated by the pastor during the church's anniversary sermon, his goals are to "promote biblical morals and raise the standard of Christian living" (Gibson, 2011).

Mt. Olive is currently affiliated with the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) and the National Baptist Convention (NBC) USA Inc. The PNBC emerged out of the Civil Rights Movement and was founded by Black Baptists who strongly supported Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,

who sought to ensure human rights for the community (PNBC, 2013). Due to its involvement with the civil rights struggle, “the centerpiece of the PNBC witness became one of social justice and human liberation as a mandate of the Gospel” (PNBC, 2013). This organization has grown from 33 members to over 2.5 million members and its organized initiative even today is Civil Rights, for it continues to fight for full voter registration, education, affirmative action, economic empowerment and development, equal educational opportunity, freedom of religion, and total human liberation in the United States and South Africa (PNBC, 2013). This organization, through its network of churches, continues to pursue the civil rights struggle, which its membership argues has not been fully resolved even since the 1960s.

The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. emerged in the late 1800s, in Montgomery, Alabama, when a group of individuals grew eager to witness the Gospel of Jesus Christ being taught on African soil (NBC, 2013). The organization’s mission is to “fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ through preaching, teaching, and healing” (NBC, 2013). Their beliefs in religious freedoms serve to represent one of their mantras. They believe in free worship based upon the principles of one’s heart but embrace biblical truths without negotiation, yet they are open to joining with other faith communities to become knowledgeable and supportive of their faith expressions (NBC, 2013).

When I asked Reverend Gibson which organizations our church are affiliated with, he proceeded to tell me that though the church is affiliated with the PNBC and the NBC, he is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) outside of the church, an affiliation that emerged before his pastoral leadership at Mt. Olive. The SBC is an organization or union of Baptist churches. The organization was founded in 1845 in Augusta, Georgia and the membership has grown to over 16 million members who worship in more in over 40, 000 churches across the United States (SBC, 2013). With so many churches associated with this convention, it becomes important to understand some of the ideologies of the organization as they relate to race and gender. The SBC was created by a group of white males who played a major role in slavery. Northern and Southern Baptists

disagreed on the issue of slavery; the Northern Baptists refused to appoint slave owners as missionaries, whereas Southern Baptists did not see slavery as a sinful act (George, 2012). As a result of this divide, the Southern Baptist Convention emerged. George explains, the SBC passed thirty-one resolutions about race, and one of their goals was to religiously instruct colored people (George, 2013). The pastors of this convention were sent to impart religious messages to slaves as to uphold a saint-like image to these oppressed individuals. This organization sought to teach the bible through a Eurocentric framework to control the religious beliefs of their slaves and maintain power over them. Their views on race inform the power and dominance they assumed over the religious lives of enslaved blacks.

In addition to advocating for slavery, they have also been very patriarchal in their beliefs that women should be relegated to a place behind men. Their beliefs on race and gender inform the ways in which black women are treated in Baptist churches. Within Kaylor's study, he examines the SBC'S views of women in society based on the organization's publications in the SBC's *Baptist Press* from August 2004 till January 2005. Women are described in this paper as serving three primary roles, which include the submissive wife, fulfilled mother, and the secondary Christian (Kaylor, 2010). Within the *Baptist Press*, it was stated that the women should submit to their husband if they want to abide by the principles of the bible, and that they are to submit to their husband's decisions and authority without question (Kaylor, 2010). Furthermore, the fulfilling mother is suggested to be the primary role of a woman (Kaylor, 2010). This role is supposedly more important than that of a professional job, for women are to stay at home and find fulfillment in leading children to God. Lastly, Kaylor found that women are portrayed as secondary Christians, in that they should not serve as pastors or have positions of authority over men (Kaylor, 2010). Kaylor (2010) notes, "Women are depicted and praised for ministry quite frequently but the majority of those place women only in positions to minister to women or children, or to perform stereotypical female roles" (p.342). From the articles examined by Kaylor as it relates to the SBC's views on women, it is

clear that the SBC believes that women come second to men in church life and ministry. However, the literature reviewed and data gathered from the focus groups and interviews suggests that biblical feminists in the SBC believe their roles to be complementary to men.

Unlike Mt. Olive, Big Bethel is an African Methodist Episcopal Church, which is part of a connectional community. Big Bethel has a rich history in the Atlanta area. According to the *Big Bethel A.M.E. Church (2014)*, "Big Bethel A.M.E. Church was founded in 1847, and is the oldest predominately African American congregation in Metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia." Yet, the beginnings of the congregation come from the population of Terminus, Georgia before the church became affiliated with the A.M.E. denomination (Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, 2014). The church was centered in Mathasville and was the first colored Methodist church in the town that was later to be called Atlanta (Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, 2014). Following the Civil War, the congregation developed ties to the A.M.E. Church and in 1866; Reverend Joseph Woods became the first pastor of Big Bethel (Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, 2014). Eventually, the church became the center for social action and educational reform. The Gate City Colored School and Morris Brown College held its first classes in the basement of the church and the late Nelson Mandela once spoke at the church (Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, 2014). The church was rebuilt in 1922 after a horrific fire and now bears a lighted cross in the steeple that reads, "Jesus Lives" which helps to designate this site as a historical landmark (Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, 2014). Evidently, this church has strong historical roots in the community and is clearly a historical edifice.

Additionally, the structure of the church and the A.M.E. community is different from Mt. Olive. Each local church of the A.M.E. community makes up this larger connection. Big Bethel is part of the 6<sup>th</sup> district and the Southeast Atlanta Conference, which is located in Georgia. There are 22 districts around the world including Africa, Europe, South America, and the Caribbean. In an effort to understand how this connectional organization is set up, I looked to the church's website. As cited from *Big Bethel A.M.E. Church (2014)*:

The Bishops are the Chief Officers of the Connectional Organization. They are elected for life by a majority vote of the General Conference which meets every four years. Bishops are bound by the laws of the church to retire following their 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. Presiding Elders are the assistants, like middle management, whom the Bishops appoint to supervise the preachers in a Presiding Elder's District. A Presiding Elder District is one portion of an Annual Conference, which in turn is one part of the Episcopal District over which a Bishop presides. In the Presiding Elder District, the appointed Presiding Elder meets with the local churches, that comprise the District, at least once every three months for a Quarterly Conference. The Presiding Elder also presides over a District Conference and a Sunday School Convention in his or her District. At the end of an Annual Conference year, the Presiding Elder reports to the Bishop at the Annual Conference and makes recommendations for pastoral Appointments (n.p.).

Essentially, the connectional organization is made up of the general conference, the council of bishops, the board of incorporators, the general board, and the judicial council. The history and conference affiliations of Mt. Olive and Big Bethel are fairly different.

Another difference between the Baptist and Methodist Churches are the ways in which women have been treated historically. As the literature review revealed, historically women have been restricted to the margins, being forced to take on subsidiary roles in black churches. The African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Richard Allen and was the first independent black denomination in the United States (Visible Link, 2003). Allen and other ministers helped to develop and nurture this denomination, including women. Jarena Lee became the first woman to preach at the A.M.E. church. Visible Link (2003) notes:

Although never formally licensed to speak by the church, Lee began an extraordinary career as an evangelist. She began her work as leader of a predominately female

praying and singing band, later becoming an evangelist. Lee, and other women like Juliann Jane Tillman, made a considerable impact on religious life, as well as the growth of their denomination (p. 538).

From the above-mentioned quote, the A.M.E. church has allowed women to minister within the role of pastor, elder, or bishop, but in some instances without a formal leadership assignment.

Seemingly women have been denied ordination historically, but their ministry in the Methodist church has continued to thrive as shown by Lee and Tillman. Thus, despite their historical marginalization, black women have pledged an allegiance to the church in both the Baptist and Methodist denominations. The women who participated in this study come from these two denominations.

#### **4.2 The Participants**

Fourteen African American women who reside in Georgia and attend Mt. Olive or Big Bethel participated in this study. Ten of the participants are members of Mt. Olive and four of the participants are members of Big Bethel. Participants' ages ranged from 51 years old to 84 years old and their length of membership ranged from 5 years to 60 years. Many of the participants were from the Mt. Olive because this site was the most accessible. Also many of the participants believe *other mothers* to be older women or elders, which is clearly represented in the age range of the participants. Thus, many of the participants' perceptions of mothering were similar. All of these women have biological children with the exception of one of the participants who has never given birth. All of the participants identified themselves as African American and as female. 8 of the participants hold bachelors degrees, four of the participants hold both bachelors and masters degrees, one of the participants completed one year of college, and one of the participants completed high school. All of the participants have taken on multiple roles in their churches, which range from being part of women's ministries to being teachers in their churches. Interestingly, the majority of the participants have acted as Sunday school teachers, vacation bible schoolteachers, or

children's church instructors. Please see Table 4.1, which contains demographic information for each participant.

**Table 4.1: Study Participants**

Name	Race	Age	Church of Membership	Length of Membership	Educational Background	Position in the Church	Are you a biological mother?
Dot	Black	82	Mt. Olive	53 years	Masters Degree, Retired Teacher	Mother's ministry, Chairperson of baptism	Yes
Marian J.	Black	65	Mt. Olive	33 years	Bachelors of Arts, Furthered studies at CDA	Superintendent of Sunday School, Lady's usher board, Women's ministry	Yes
Georgina	Black	64	Mt. Olive	54 years	College Graduate	Sunday School Teacher, Choir Member, VP of Women's Ministry, Nurses Ministry	Yes
Mary	Black	84	Mt. Olive	50 + years	High School Graduate	Mother's Ministry	Yes
Lois	Black	82	Mt. Olive	50 + years	Masters	Mother's Ministry, Sunday Teacher, Usher Board	Yes
Kyla	Black	53	Mt. Olive	46 years	Masters	Usher Member	Yes
Lynette	Black	59	Mt. Olive	52 years	Bachelors	Asst. Youth Coordinator, Kitchen Ministry	Yes
May	Black	51	Mt. Olive	5 years	Bachelors	Chairperson of Women's Ministry	Yes
Debbie	Black	66	Mt. Olive	56 years	College-1year	Church Clerk, Usher	Yes
Sarina	Black	70	Mt. Olive	60 years	BA, MA, EDS	Active Member, Choir Member, Secretary of Berean Sunday School	No
Marion R.	Black	73	Big Bethel	50+ years	College Graduate	Usher, Choir Member, Acolyte Trainer, Steward, YPD director, Sunday School Teacher	Yes
Rosanne	Black	59	Big Bethel	32 years	Bachelors	Minister	Yes
Louise	Black	84	Big Bethel	60 years	High School	Class Leader	Yes
Ruth	Black	70	Big Bethel	20 + years	Bachelors	Choir Member, Vacation Bible School Instructor	Yes



### 4.3 Data Analysis

The purpose of this study is to understand and assess the ways that *other mothering* functions in black churches. This study also seeks to examine the everyday experiences of women in these environments, how ideas about faith and the bible inform these participants' religiosity, and whether the participants are empowered through their *other mothering roles*. In order to understand the commonalities between these two churches and participants, I utilized two methods of coding. For the first cycle of coding I utilized descriptive coding and for the second cycle of coding, I utilized pattern coding. As I went through the transcripts, I descriptively coded the data based on the participant's discussion of their church and everyday experiences. Thereafter, I conducted pattern coding, where I went through the transcripts one by one looking for similar themes that could be identified with similar words and phrases. Many of the words and phrases used in this coding cycle are reflective of the study's theoretical framework, womanist theology. From these coding methods, I came across seven patterns between the focus groups and interviews.

### 4.4 Discussion of Themes and Categories

This study seeks to understand how *other mothering* functions in two predominately black Atlanta Metropolitan churches. In addition, it seeks to understand how the everyday experiences of black women are portrayed through the role of the mothering, how ideas about faith and the bible influence one's ministry, and whether black women are empowered through their maternal roles. When assessing these different ideas, several themes emerged during the focus groups and interviews. In correlation with the research questions, I identified 7 themes from the focus groups and individual interviews that were conducted with participants. Table 4.2 outlines the research questions, themes and categories.

**Table 4.2: Themes and Categories**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Themes/ Categories</b>
Where and how does <i>other mothering</i> function in black churches?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love, mothering, and ministry</li> <li>• Teachers are ministers too</li> </ul>
How are the everyday experiences of laywomen, elders, and clergywomen in the church portrayed through the role of mothering?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other daughters to other mothers</li> <li>• Intersection of church, community, and family</li> </ul>
Do women's ideas about their faith and the bible impact their ministry?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Servanthood and being Christ-like</li> </ul>
Are women empowered by their maternal ministerial roles?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women ordained by God</li> <li>• Women affirmed in the bible</li> </ul>

#### **4.5 *Other Mothering in the Church***

In an effort to assess the ways that *other mothering* may function in black churches, I asked a number of questions during each focus group to understand the ways that these women mother in their religious environments. These questions allowed the participants to discuss their understanding of mothering, their roles in the church, their daily life experiences, and their use of God-talk. Essentially, there were two commonalities in both focus groups. All of these women defined mothering and ministry similarly and all of these women took on teaching roles in some way, shape or form.

##### **4.5.1 *Love, Mothering and Ministry***

This section will discuss the ways that participants of Mt. Olive and Big Bethel define mothering and ministry. I will discuss the key words and phrases that arose constantly throughout each group session. In an effort to assess the importance of participants' assessments of mothering and ministry, I will discuss certain conversations during the focus group.

I labeled this pattern, "love, mothering, and ministry" because as I asked participants to define mothering and ministry exclusively to hear the ways that the participants understand mothering and ministry and how these two concepts are part of their everyday lives. As observed by participants, to mother is to *love, show compassion, care, protect, perform an everyday task, have*

*patience, be non-judgmental, nurturing, be responsible, to minister, to lead, to teach, to preach, show support, be mirrors, to share, to listen, fill an empty void, to be like Jesus, to teach women proper etiquette, and to act without permission.* Love is a term that came up repeatedly throughout both focus groups. During the first focus group at Mt. Olive, this word arose about 31 times and during the focus group at Big Bethel, this word arose about 36 times. May was the first participant to associate mothering with love. She discusses the relationship between mothering to her biological children and her *other children* in which she similarly sees her role as a mother as one where she is to provide love. She stated:

My role as a mother is my most important role in this world. When you bring a child into this world, I feel like you have a responsibility to love that child unconditionally no matter what happens. That is your child. And that's just my way of thinking as a mother, and not only for my children, but when I see other children that need ---I'll reach out to a child in a minute. I'll give a child or an adult to take care of a child, my last dollar, because that what we are supposed to do as women. We are supposed to love, and to protect, and take care of our children. That is just number one.

Like May, Debbie found love to be essential to the mothering role. She explained her experiences as a young parent in the midst of her children's extracurricular activities and all of their classmates and friends. She stated:

I think that's one of the basic instincts of a mother is to show love, and when you have that persona about you, they will gravitate towards you, and I know my children used to say, okay, how come they always calling you mom or grandma? Sometimes there are other people besides your children that need that love. They need that love, and sometimes you can pick up on it, and sometimes you can't, but if you just look around you and you see a little child keep coming up to you, they're looking for something that you have.

Debbie goes on to say that “Motherhood is love. It’s about love, you have to show them that.”

Similar to the women of Mt. Olive, the women at Big Bethel associate love and mothering with one another. Interestingly, they included their ideas about ministry into the discussion as well. In both churches, these women have seen women, men, boys, and girls being ostracized because of their sexual orientation. However, these women think that the power of a mother’s love can make these individuals feel welcomed in the church and religious communities. Rosanne explains that the judgment should be left up to God and as *other mothers*, “We leave that up to God. But what we do is show love and pray for them, and keep ourselves at a point where they’ll be open—they want to be open enough to come to us.” Rosanne goes on to say, “So I’m not going to condemn you, but I am to show you—I’m to reach back with a loving hand...and share the love that was shared with us.” In agreement with Rosanne, Ruth states, “Just keep loving them, walking with them, and giving them support.” As I examined both Rosanne and Ruth’s discussion of love and mothering, I began to understand their ministry as well.

In addition to asking participants to define mothering, I also asked them to define ministry. I began by defining ministry in my own words. I defined ministry to the participants as any type of service used to preach or teach the gospel of Christ. I reiterated to them throughout the discussion that ministry is not just exhibited by people that are considered leaders but by any servant of God. After compiling responses from both groups, the participants explained that ministry does not have to be leadership but it can be *reaching out to those in need through a message, servanthood, teaching about the bible, being like Christ, and sharing scriptures*. Lastly, these women explained that ministry is modeling Jesus’s servanthood by showing compassion and love. Georgina, discusses the intersection between love, mothering and ministry through her discussion of Jesus. Speaking of Jesus’s proclamation to women to walk in his footsteps, she states, Jesus has said to her, “I’m telling you, this is how you’re supposed to live it, and I’m going to show you how to do it.” Georgina proceeds:

We are to proclaim the gospel, and that's part of our ministries as a Christian... Because we're talking about compassion...and that's all Jesus was talking about, and that's such a mother thing...and you know, as mothers, that's the image that we want to project, the one of Jesus...He was meeting people's needs through love and caring on all levels, physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. His ministry is meeting people's needs, through loving and caring on all levels, wherever they may need those needs to be met.

From Georgina, there is this connection between Jesus and mothering and Jesus and ministry because Jesus represents love and a servant, which *other mothers* are to mimic.

Rosanne expressed similar views as Georgina. When Georgina found herself in the midst of troubled children, she asked herself, "Are these young children going to commit suicide? What? What is going on? As a minister, I had to say, what's going on with us? As a minister, what are we not doing Lord?" Then she learned that her role as *maternal minister* was to "Show the love of Christ and what God wants us to do." Rosanne was also faced with a situation where she was asked to baptize the baby of a gay couple. She casts judgment aside and embraced the idea that she should "Show the love of Christ in all things." All things include her ministry and mothering roles both inside and outside of the church. She baptized the child because "God loves those people" just the same and if she is to be a servant and a mother, she must demonstrate this love. Thus, like Georgina, Jesus shows up in one's mothering and ministry for Rosanne as well.

#### **4.5.2 Teachers are ministers too**

During both focus groups, I noticed that every single one of these women took on the role as a teacher. Many of these women were certified teachers in a school system and others were considered teachers in their church environments. Essentially, teaching may be a form of preaching and *maternal ministry*. Conversations from the focus groups that speak to this theme will be discussed in this section. If preaching is a form of teaching, it is safe to say that teachers may be

considered ministers. As many of the participants discussed their roles in their church environments and their everyday experiences, they revealed themselves to be teachers inside and outside of the church. Two participants demonstrated the ways that their teaching and mother roles coincide with one another both inside and outside of the church. Marian J. of Mt. Olive and Marion R. of Big Bethel are the participants who embodied these characteristics. Both of these women have worked in the school system and have continued to display their teaching abilities in their church homes. Marian J. of Mt. Olive started working with the church school in the 1980s, when a woman on the mother's board asked for her assistance to teach class while she was on vacation. Due to her experience in the secular school system and her experiences of growing up in Sunday school, Marian J. was selected as an assistant teacher, associate superintendent, and later superintendent, which is a role that she still maintains. Marian J. didn't spend a lot of time discussing her experiences as superintendent due to time constraints and the group's familiarity with her position, but she did discuss how her work in the school system is informed and informs her educational and nurturing role at the church. She stated:

One experience was I had taught this child. A car ran her over not to far from here. Oh, it just devastated her body. So when the child was released from the hospital... and at that time, I heard she would be coming back to the school. The principal said, now she'll be in your class. She said, because you have the patience and compassion to work with her and bring her up. So I thought about it. I was shaking my head. I said, oh Lord, but I went home and prayed.

Marian J. goes on to explain that the child had no physiological capabilities and that she basically had to teach her how to walk and talk again. By the end of the school term, the results were unreal. Marian J. stated:

Her bald head of hair had grown down her back. Her eyes were bright. She was a whole new –looked like evolved, reformed child, and I could remember many instances where

I had to just put her in my lap, because she started weeping when she'd look around and see other children moving and having fun...at the end of the school term it paid off because she got back in the range where she could move and be the individual God God had created her to be.

Marian J. learned a great deal about *other mothering* from this experience. For her, *other mothering* shows up in the school and church and she was ministering to students in both arenas. Marian J. said, "Mothering is not always in your bio—but reaching out in that compassionate mode and bringing children into being and working with them, and sharing the word of God with them" is a type of maternal ministry.

Marion R. of Big Bethel has also worked in the school system. Marion R. didn't talk much about her work in the public school system as Marian J. did. However, she does discuss her teaching roles in the church. Marion stated:

I've had the opportunity to be an *other mother* in many situations as a trainer of the acolytes. Now some people may not know what an acolyte is. We train the children. We give them church history. First of all, we give them biblical history and biblical principles, because they learn the bible in acolyte training. And then the acolyte is the one who takes the light, brings the light in, they light the candles on the altar, and they— bring the light out, and we're supposed to come in with the light in us, and we go out with the light to serve Jesus Christ.

Marion R. explains that this type of training and discipline that goes into the acolyte program is emblematic of the ways African American churches have assisted in raising and nurturing children. While Marian J. and Marion R. discuss two different experiences, one in the church and one outside of the church, it is clear that there is an intersection between teaching and their ability to minister through their mothering roles. Due to the rich parallels between teaching and ministering, I didn't find it hard to believe when Ruth, who has also been a teacher in the public school system and

church, said that she is often mistaken for a preacher. She stated, “I had one student ask me one time, said, Ruth, are you a ---a preacher? I said no. I’m not a preacher but preachers teach and teachers preach.” Essentially, these women teach children the ways of God as second mothers.

#### **4.6 Everyday Experiences and Mothering**

This section will discuss some of the mutual everyday experiences of the participants and how these experiences inform their mothering roles. The experiences of laywomen, elders, and clergywomen will be acknowledged and interpreted through the lens of mothering. I asked open-ended questions seeking to discover the ways that these women’s everyday experiences inform their mothering. Two of the themes that will be addressed here are *other daughters to other mothers* and the intersection of church, family, and community.

##### **4.6.1 Other Daughters to Other Mothers**

This section will discuss the ways in which the participants have transitioned from *other daughters to other mothers*. The *other mothers* in their lives, the transference of mothering, and *reverse mothering* will be examined. Examples of this theme will be come from the focus group sessions.

As participants reflected on their roles as *other mothers*, these women discussed the ways that they have been *other daughters* and how *other mothers* have ministered to them. Whether these women experienced secondary mother figures in the church, community, or family, each and every one of the participants mother to so many because someone mothered to them. As Georgina and Rosanne both believe, “It takes a village to raise a child.”

At some point in their lives, all of these women were *other daughters* in that they were influenced by secondary maternal figures. Lois, May, and Georgina all reflected on their experiences as *other daughters* and how this influences their ministry as mothers. Lois who is now 84, recalls when she was a young girl, a member of the mother’s board made sure of her Sunday school attendance, which had a lasting impact on her life. Lois stated:



Mother Gray, I tell you, I can wake up on Sunday mornings now, and I say, you know what? I don't feel like going to Sunday school, so I'm not going. Honestly, this is not an exaggeration. Mother Gray comes to me and she says, *Lois, I told you, you're going to have to keep that Lydia bible class going...* she started me off, and she talked to me constantly about this church, so it's a lasting thing. It doesn't stop, you know?

Every since Lois was spiritually nurtured and disciplined by Mother Gray, she has continued to walk in her footsteps as a Sunday school teacher, seeking to instill the same values in children and developing adults as this mother did to her.

Like Lois, May was influenced by influential mother figures, and lives by their lessons and guidance today as she mothers to others. She stated:

You know, I had my Sunday school teacher always saying, May, do the right thing and right will follow you. And you know, just those concepts, and that's -- I use those same concepts with my own children, you know? You do your part, God will do the rest. If you do the right thing, right will follow you. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And remember what you do always comes back to you, and just putting those concepts that not only my mother, but the other adult women in the church took out the time to just have conversations with you, not always to be mean or to say bad things to you, but it's that they wanted the best for you, and because they wanted the best for you, they were willing to take a little time out to say something to you, and to guide you in the way that God wanted you to go. And I think that's -

That's really, really important, and I think we take on that role ourselves in the church, with the children that are in the church, the children that are in the neighborhood.

May went on to discuss her relationship with her children and their neighborhood friends and how she takes a vested interest in their lives as she would her own children. She stated, "That's the role of a mother, that spiritual guidance that you give to people that you're around, whether they're

children, or whether they are other adults that just need a listening ear." May works closely with the women's ministry at Mt. Olive, teaching women and children the importance of living right and by the precepts of the bible. Georgina like Lois and May has been an *other daughter* and has used this role as an opportunity to listen to the teachings and knowledge of women to pass along to future generations. However, Georgina has not always viewed herself as an *other mother* or as the best mother. Often times, the *other mothers* in her life were filling in when she fell short of her motherly duties. She stated:

Folks say, well, you got -- you have great children. I said, I didn't do that. I had so many *other mothers*. Everybody, every woman that touched my child's life was a mother to them. Probably some of them were far more mothering than I was, because I know I am not the best mother in the world, but that's what -- that's why other mothering is as important as it is.

However, the support provided to Georgina by other women who helped in raising her children simply speaks to the importance of the village ideology discussed by Georgina herself and Rosanne. In fact, if women fall short of their duties as a mother, in the eyes of the participants, women are responsible for stepping in as second mothers. Marion R. of Big Bethel explained:

Parents are not being attentive, and your heart goes out to that child, and you -- you -- without saying I'm going to be your mother, you show -- you show this child that I will be your mother. If you need something, you come to me. You call on me. If you just need to talk, call me.

Mothering without the permission of biological parents is often times necessary to soothe the wounds of a child. This idea of mothering without permission was definitely a concept that resonated throughout both focus groups. For the most part, the participants in both groups discussed their lives as *other daughters* and their motherly influences. However, one idea that was that arose was also this idea of *reverse mothering*.

*Reverse mothering* may take place when a mother and daughter switch roles. In the case of Rosanne, while she is an *other mother*, she has been an *other daughter* to other women but to her own daughter as well. Her daughter has been almost like a spiritual mother to her, teaching her the principles of the bible and guiding her path to Big Bethel. Rosanne's daughter who is now 36 years old, joined Big Bethel in 1980 without her mother. Rosanne would drop her daughter off and pick her back up from the church but did not attend. All of a sudden Rosanne said to herself, "My daughter is joining Big Bethel and I'm not even there." Eventually, she was led by her daughter's teachings and spirit to Big Bethel. Rosanne stated:

She would come back and she would recite the Bible and everything, and I came, and I stayed here one month without coming, and then all of a sudden I found myself in front of the church, and I had joined.

Essentially, Rosanne's daughter contributed to her spiritual upbringing at Big Bethel. This *reverse mothering* was that was completely unapparent until this focus group. This concept offered a very nuanced understanding of *other mothering*.

Out of all of the participants that transitioned from an *other daughter* to an *other mother*, I found Georgina's transition to stand out among the rest and worth exploring further. As I interviewed Georgina, I realized that she had a rather fascinating transition from *other daughter* to *other mother*. Essentially, she stood out among the other participants. She was initially skeptical about deeming herself as an *other mother*. She hasn't always viewed herself as the best mother. However, now she is slowly beginning to take on the role of an *other mother* as did the second mothers in her life and her children's lives.

Georgina is a 64-year-old African American woman who has been a member of Mt. Olive for 54 years. She is a biological mother of three girls and she takes on various roles in her church. She is a Sunday school teacher, choir member, vice president of the women's ministry, and on the nurse's ministry. It was interesting that several women in the focus group believed her to be a good mother

as well as an *other mother* but Georgina herself did not which was worth further exploring. After underestimating her mothering role, Georgina did identify as an *other mother* and *maternal minister*. Essentially, this study was empowering for Georgina and gave her a title, which she can identify, though it does add some added pressure to her fulfilling this ministry.

Georgina has not seen herself as the best mother but as she began to reflect on her mothering experiences, her perception of herself was beginning to change. Georgina began by discussing how she raised her three daughters and how *other mothers* assisted her. Essentially, she didn't raise her children alone. Georgina stated:

From the one who was my choir director when I was young, to one of the mothers who was the director of the nursery at the church that we had. Mother Tinsley was really one of the mothers, even to Sister Taylor, who now is the pastoral nurse, but she was an *other mother*. She pretty much raised my middle. She cared for my middle daughter when she was a baby. I remember when we put her in the nursery; she was actually 6 weeks old and pretty much it was kind of out of the realm of the age where they wanted to accept a child but she was taken and Ms. Tinsley told Ms. Taylor that she needs to take real good care of the baby, so she did. She had a six week old that she took care of nearly everyday. I had her there, that was kind of *other mothering* that I really remember as I was raising my children.

To Georgina, *other mothers* are "older women in the group that are there to give wisdom and also try to show what should be the way that you should be going." Women like Mother Tinsley and Ms. Taylor not only provided wisdom to her children but to Georgina herself. Georgina later realized that she was acting in the very roles of the *other mothers* in she and her daughter's lives. She often ministers to a woman in the church who used to abuse drugs. When I asked her if she saw this as mothering, she stated, "I mean I do, and I guess it's just that I don't look at that in those terms, but that's what it is." She also ministers and mothers to children in the school system as a substitute

teacher, reminding herself to remain calm when they act out. She stated, "Its in the book of James, it talks about being slow to anger, that's one of the things that *other mothers* definitely have to work on is not getting angry at these children." The aforementioned statement is a clear intersection of Georgina's mothering and her biblical teachings, and reveals part of her transformation from *other daughter* to *other mother*.

Being a maternal minister is apart of her everyday life as a teacher and a biological mother but also as a woman of the church. Georgina displays mothering from the choir loft by demonstrating choir etiquette to young choir members. She explained, "As a choir member in the choir loft and you see me chewing gum, that's not a good example of what I should be doing." She also discussed the inappropriateness of texting and using earphones in the choir loft. These do's and don'ts are disciplinary tactics, which are indicative of mothering and ministry, for Georgina she is teaching younger generations to maintain respect for their musical ministry.

For Georgina like the other women, the bible is what guides her ministry as mother. I asked Georgina if she ever finds herself preaching or teaching from the bible and she said, "I do, whenever I get in conversations like this, I resort to what I have learned from my staying in the bible." The bible has taught Georgina to be a servant and as we learned from the focus groups, mothering is a type of servanthood. Furthermore, servanthood is about being Christ-like, thus there is correlation between mothering and Jesus. Jesus embodies the qualities that all mothers should; he is both caring and nurturing. Georgina informed me that Jesus has a special connection to black women. She explained that the Shrine of the Black Madonna believes that the mother of Jesus was black and that there is a Catholic church in Poland that worships Jesus's mother as a black woman. Georgina insinuated that if Jesus's mother is a black woman, it is important that these women "be examples of Godly women." In her *other mothers*, she stated that she saw "The good Christian qualities, I didn't see the vulgarity or the profanity...I saw humility, soft-spokenness...in the ladies of Mt. Olive when I was growing up."

After Georgina expressed how *other mothers* influenced her, how she has come to take on this role, and how she must act as a Godly woman, the internalization of her being a “bad mother” had begun to subside. In fact, this study gave her a position for herself both inside and outside of the church. She stated, “I guess it’s just now given me a place where I can say so this where this needs to be categorized as, as *other mothering*. Its kind of, that’s kind of what these sessions have been, its given me a category.” Georgina’s response indicates the importance of identity and assuming power over one’s positionality. Also important to understand is that Georgina fully transitioned from an *other daughter* to an *other mother* during this study, her entire mentality about her ability to mother changed, which is a powerful ideological transformation.

#### **4.6.2 The Intersection of Church, Community, and Family**

While this study examines *other mothering* in the church, this concept is not exclusive to this institution. Mothering cannot be assessed without examining its function in the community and family as well. Essentially, *other mothers* may take on varying titles. Those titles and varying mothering experiences will be discussed here and interpreted based on the women’s responses from the focus groups. As the women continued to discuss their duties as women of the church and their everyday experiences, I noticed an intersection between church, family, and community, and how mothering is similarly enacted in each of these environments. Three women who embody mothering in two or more of these arenas are Sarina, Dot, and Rosanne. Sarina discussed the importance of training children up in the way they should go, teaching them the way the bible says that the should go, and instilling in them the importance of becoming productive citizens. She also discusses how she mothered those in her own family. She stated:

When I see children in my neighborhood, children, you know, wherever, I have taught thousands, and ministered thousands and thousands of children during my career. I was in the school system. Well, of course I ministered to them, and also, I had after school programs, tutorial, voluntarily. I did tutorial programs. I did table

tennis. I did other sports where I had children who were in -- where unfortunately in low income families, and they were having a lot of problems, so I tried to help them, and I have seen the results, because a lot of them have come up to be productive citizens.

As a teacher in the church like many of the aforesaid women, an educator in the school system, and a pillar of the community, Sarina has practiced mothering in the church and school communities.

Sarina continued to describe how she is an *other mother* in her family as well. She continued:

You know? My mother, -- she died at a very early age. I was a mother to her. I see about her -- My father. I've seemed to have been the one in the family to take care of us. My mother, my brothers, my sisters, and now I'm doing my aunts, who helped bring me up, and if anybody had ever told me that the role would be reversed It's reversed, because I have to protect them. They're in a situation where I have to, you know, see about them, and nourish them as a child.

Similar to Rosanne, Sarina has experienced reverse mothering, in that she was a mother to her own mother. She also discusses mothering to her brothers and sisters, and now aunts who were mothers to her who and can no longer fend for themselves. As a woman of God, she ministers to her those in her church, family, and community through the role of a mother.

Unlike Sarina, Dot was a rather quiet participant. However, once we reached the subject of mothering in varying arenas, she was able to relate to the topic and discuss her own experiences. Dot is the member of the mother's ministry and she is chairperson for baptism, so she comes in contact with children and adults regularly, and relays to them the meaning of salvation and living righteously. These roles have always been apparent but Dot surprised herself when she was able to minister to women in a grocery store. She encountered two women coming out of a grocery store with about five children, using very profane language. She stated:

So God gave me enough courage to approach the ladies, and I approached those two ladies and I said, may I say something to you? They said yes. I said, well, do you know

that what you're doing and how you're talking, the children are listening to you, and they're going to do the same thing, and you need to, you know, watch what you say.

Dot suggested that she was led by the spirit to minister to these women about parenting. This wasn't an easy task but Dot was able to mimic the ministry that she already portrayed at Mt. Olive as a church mother and in her family as a grandmother.

Out of all of the participants, Rosanne most closely represented someone who mothers in the church, community, and family because she mothers to three generations. Rosanne particularly stood out among the other participants because she mothers to children, adults, and elders. After analyzing Rosanne's story more closely during an individual interview, I realized that she was the best example of a *cross-generational mother*, a role that presents itself in her church, community and family.

Rosanne is 53-year-old African American woman who has been a member of Big Bethel for 32 years. She has one biological child and she is an ordained minister. I chose Rosanne for an individual interview because she has been mothering to three generations and has never considered what she does to be mothering until this experience and study. However, she strives to be a Titus woman and in that role, she is able to mother to whomever she needs to. She also teaches other women how to be Titus women. This scripture speaks directly to the idea of *other mothering* and ministering maternally. Reading from Titus 2:3-5 from the King James Version (1987) of the bible, she stated:

The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior, as becometh holiness not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love thy husband, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God not be blasphemed.



Rosanne has lived by this verse particularly that which speaks to teaching young women to love their children and to live for Christ in all that they do. I learned from the focus groups of her work in the community and how she acted as an *other mother* to the children at Bethel Towers and of the community. However, I want to discuss how she has mothered to her grandson, middle-aged women in her church, and elders. To her 12-year-old grandson, Rosanne is a grandmother. Whenever he finds himself in tough situations, she has taught him to ask himself, "What would Jesus do?" She has warned him that he would come to a pivotal point in his life where he would have to make a difficult decision and ask himself that question. Rosanne revealed to me that her grandson dealt with a situation where he was at school and it was time to go outside for recess. Rosanne stated her grandson said, "I looked to my left and saw my friends and they was over there and they was smoking cigarettes...and then I looked to my right at my friends...they was just throwing the ball." Her grandson came to that pivotal moment. He told Rosanne, "I was at that pivotal moment, you'll never believe it grandma, I went to the right and I was there with all my friends and we threw that ball." The principles that Rosanne taught her grandson allowed him to walk in the footsteps of Christ. This experience shows the ways that Rosanne is an *other mother* to young generations.

In addition, Rosanne has been a mother to middle-aged parents at her church. Rosanne's mother suffered from Alzheimer's for 11 years and there are those at her church who are experiencing the same things so they look to Rosanne for comfort. She stated, "My church members knew that I was keeping my mom and everything so some whose going through that now, we talk about and ask questions, concerns of how I dealt with it and everything." Rosanne gives these same parents advice on how to deal with their children when they are going through difficult situations. Providing motherly wisdom, she states often to these parents:

Never try to come against them because they need someone that they can always say,  
that I can always go back to my parents, no matter what I was going through out there,

that there was always that home base and mom was always there for me able to share, see this is happening because I knew that the prayer line was there to God for me and you have to let them know that.

Here Rosanne, relays to parents the importance of spiritual parenting to those seeking to raise their children to the best of their abilities and with a Christian backing. Essentially, Rosanne transfers her maternal teachings to other parents through Christian principles.

Rosanne currently works at a Senior citizen home in Atlanta, called Big Bethel Village and she finds her role at this residence to be that of a mother to the elders. Despite many of the residents being older than Rosanne herself, she still sees herself in the position of a mother. She stated:

I still feel myself mothering even though they are older than I and they give me wisdom and knowledge that still the mothering role is in me to want the best for them. And even though I have had the stroke and everything, I still want for them, I still make sure that they are all right and everything. So I think its something that is embedded into our spirits, it just keeps on flowing and you just learn how to use it and handle it in different ways. Still trying to share that word, and that's what mothering is so much about, sharing the goodness of life and more of Christ, of God, sometimes we come in contact with so many different faiths out there that we cant always say Jesus Christ but we can always say God, where it all stems from.

As the chaplain at Big Bethel Village, Rosanne has found her motherly role emerging in conjunction with her ministry. She embodies those characteristics that so many of the participants used to define mothering such as being nurturing, caring, and compassionate. She seeks to be a Christ-like servant because "In living for Christ you learn to live for your children and for the people of the world." For Rosanne, Christ needs to show up in mothering, which means she looks past judgment to mother. Rosanne was sure to discuss how she ministers to those who would seemingly not

follow the precepts of the bible. She ministers to “the sisters of the night”. In addition, she ministers to “the drug brothers” on the street. Speaking of one she ministers regularly to, she stated, “I love him dearly now and everything and came to love him, and when I see him, it's like I'm seeing my child. And he said, woman of God, pray for me.” Those on the community's streets, those in the church, those in her family, and those who are old enough to mother to Rosanne herself see her for her ministry and her maternal instincts, which portray Rosanne as a *cross generational other mother* .

#### **4.7 Ideas About Faith and the Bible**

As Dot has shown, it takes a great deal of courage to mother and to minister. The participants expressed to me that they have the courage to minister because their ministry is part of their servanthood and their responsibility to walk in the footsteps of Christ. This section will examine women's ideas about faith and the bible and how these ideas inform their maternally grounded ministry. Many of these women shared specific teachings and biblical sayings that have resonated with them throughout the years. One theme that emerged during the focus groups that speak to this idea, is servanthood and being Christ-like.

##### ***4.7.1 Servanthood and Being Christ-like***

Being a servant of God may come in many forms. The responsibility of serving God was significant to all the participants as shown by their reflections on what they should be doing as women and mother figures to fulfill the will of God and to honor God. With examples from the focus groups, I will explore how the participants identify as servants and how these women see themselves fulfilling the will of God.

As portrayed by these women, knowing Jesus and his principles are also essential to walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. These women think it is their duty to teach children and adults the importance of emulating the love of Christ. Points in the focus groups where Jesus was discussed will also be addressed here.

During the focus groups, the participants expressed an obligation to minister and serve as *other mothers* because in their eyes this is part of their servanthood. In essence, they must be as the ultimate servant of God, Jesus Christ. Between both focus groups the word *serve* was spoken 21 times, *Jesus* was spoken 25 times, and *Christ* was spoken 23 times. Immediately, I began to see a connection between these three terms. Lois was the first participant to express her duty to minister, which is informed, by her duty to God. She stated, "Everything that's done is done to enhance, and to praise, and give God all of the honor, and therefore, when we minister, it should be words that will enhance that individual to look toward our heavenly father." Georgina expresses the same sentiments, she stated, "We are servants, we are to proclaim the gospel, and that's part of the ministries as a Christian." If these women are ministering to children and adults in the image of Christ, they are to show compassion as Jesus did, whom Georgina considers a mother figure. She stated, "Don't just talk the talk. But you've got to walk the walk because that's what Jesus did."

In essence, they are teaching those in the church, family, and community to walk in the image of Christ as well. Sarina spoke of mothering "on a spiritual level not only to children but to everybody" and furthermore, women can "evangelize spiritually." However, women must do so in their servanthood. She stated:

You have to be an example, you know, of the Christ-like qualities, in my case, you know, so that others will see how you live, how you have let your light so shine – that others may see your good works and glorify the father, and they will want what you have. They want some of that. You know, what is that keeps you doing what you do that they like? You know, they see in you, you know? They want some of that. So you -- So the other mothering, to me, looking at it on a spiritual level, and not only would it involve children, but it could involve anybody.

Acting in the image of Christ means teaching children and adults to mimic him as well. Lynette explained, "We're trying to get the children involved just like we were when we were coming up,

teach them the word of God” and to abide by that word. Similarly, ministering to the children in her family and those who she educated in the school system, as a servant of God, Marion R. “mentioned God to those children,” even though it was against the district’s rules. She expressed to them that, “The good that we do comes from Him. And so I had to let them know, you know, God is the one you're supposed to serve.” To Marion R. , she and other women are fulfilling “God’s will by mothering,” which is essentially “doing good” as Marion R. suggests. As maternal ministers, these women are to recruit more servants. Rosanne stated, “The word of God tells us that we are disciples, and we are to go out and make disciples of others.” Making disciples of others may take more than ministering to children and adults within the church. Its necessary to minister outside of one’s traditional element, which means, reaching those in secular environments. Ruth suggests ministering to people outside of the church in a natural setting, taking scriptures and discussing them in the context of their lives. All of these methods of serving God through their mothering roles are symbolic of these women’s servanthood which is also indicative of walking in the image of Christ for them.

#### **4.8 Women Empowered by their Ministerial Roles**

This section will discuss whether or not black women feel empowered through their mothering roles at their church homes. Essentially, the women in this study felt both empowered and liberated in their religious institutions. Two themes that emerged during the discussion of empowerment are women ordained by god and women affirmed in the bible.

##### ***4.8.1 Women Ordained by God***

Several times throughout the focus groups, the participants discussed their beliefs about God having a plan for them as women. Black women ultimately were destined to have a responsibility in the church and community to be mothers. A discussion of the ways in which these women see their position as mothers as a message from God will be assessed with examples from the focus groups. The reason that so many of the participants hold themselves accountable for

being *other mothers* and *maternal ministers* is because many of them feel that they were created by their maker to be mothers. Lois, Kyla, and May expressed their internalized ordination as mothers. Referring to children and adults, Lois stated:

I feel that God placed mothers on Earth so that they can see us and feel God. Feel the spirit, but actually see us, and I think we are special, and we are special, because what we won't do for our children, I can't name.

Kyla echoes the sentiments of Lois, and continues to discuss God's duty for women who are placed in this position. She explained:

Mothering is a very precarious and special position, and a very special role that God has put anyone in to be able to have that opportunity to nurture, and care, and lead, and teach, and show the right way to anyone throughout your life, and touch anyone's life in a special way like that.

Being a spiritual mother is not a role that one can create for themselves or haphazardly decide to take on, it is a calling on one's life. Even though women have been marginalized for so long in black churches, these women feel that God had an alternative plan for women and that was to be *other mothers*, to touch the lives of those outside of their own biology. Marion R. stated:

We know that the mothering that we have is not just for our children, but when God gives us that mothering instinct—it goes to other children. Wherever we are, because that's who we are. And in the church, it's no different from being—African-Americans have always looked out for others' children in the community. Regardless to all the stuff that goes on, or what they say about us, we have always been mothers. Your child is my child, and my child is your child. And it was looked at that way in the African-American church. They not only fed, but they disciplined.

Marion R. takes the idea of women being ordained by God to be mothers to another level. She explains that mothering is intrinsic to black womanhood, as well as the African American church

and community. Furthermore, Marion R. explains that this role gives women power, a power that is later transferred to those being mothered to. Marion expressed:

Other mothering is a blessing, and it helps to ground the children. We know that, and talking about how it gives -- it gives us power that when we speak to those children that we have mothered, they listen to us. And then that power goes forward from us, to them, and from them to others, where they will pass it on. So it gives churchwomen a lot of power.

Marion R. expressed with myself and the group that this is all about fulfilling God's will, for mothering is a form of servanthood. Essentially, these women are empowered by their ordination, not only because they feel this in their spirits but also because they have found proof in the bible.

#### **4.8.2 Women Affirmed in the bible**

Despite the historical marginalization of black women in the church, they find their affirmation in the bible. These women find themselves empowered by God and see themselves as having a voice in the bible, which informs their voice in church communities. The participants told many stories of their affirmation and why they are able to see themselves as *maternal ministers*. In both focus groups, we discussed the pronouns used in the bible, particularly the King James Version of the text. Lois provided the group with her thoughts on where women are represented in the bible.

Women during the Biblical days were not really respected as such, because you have few women whose names were actually given in the Bible. They refer to them as woman, you know? So -- And they were always behind men. Do you realize women could not walk side by side with men during Biblical days? And somewhere in the Bible it said women were to be quiet.

Even though all of the participants in both focus groups were aware of women's neglect in the bible, interestingly, the women of both churches were able to look past the ways that gender is

constructed in the bible, still finding themselves affirmed in the text. This theme was heavily explored during the focus group at Big Bethel. When I asked if the participants saw themselves in the bible, Rosanne took us straight to the text. Rosanne stated, "We are Titus women. Open Titus. That's what it tells us, that we are to be the women to show the young generation how to be." She continued, "And that's our job. That is what Titus requires of us as women of God, that we are to show the young women how to be in the eyesight of God." While Rosanne sees herself in the bible in the book of Titus, she still sees pronouns as irrelevant like many of the other women that participated in this focus group. Marion R. stated, "God made man, but God made humans" which is why Rosanne said its important not to "get caught up in the wording." Rosanne lives by the King James Version of the bible, she "loves the sound" of the text. She explained:

I'm going to read the King James. And so I don't get caught up, because the adversary will do anything to keep you from hearing that word of God, because see the adversary knows there's empowerment as we read that word.

Rosanne contends that when we continue to focus on gender in the bible, "we might miss out on hearing the thoughts of the Holy Spirit." In the eyes of these women, women were the first preachers although this may not be explicitly stated in the bible or religious messages. Women told of Jesus's resurrection. Rosanne stated, "When it came to Jesus, we ran and told the story...sisters were the first ministers the Lord ever called." Marion R. also explained, that "women were really the first preachers." However, it is simply important to these women that they understand what God is saying to them through scripture. Rosanne said, "When God gets ready to speak through this mouth, this vessel, he's going to speak, all he asks us to do is to know and be humble before him." Thus, we when women follow these precepts, they are affirmed and empowered.

#### **4.9 Summary**

This chapter addressed the research questions, the themes and categories that arose during the study. The participants discussed their thoughts on mothering and ministry and how these two



ideas intersect in their church, family and communities. These women, particularly, the interview participants also discussed *other mothering* as a new classification for themselves and their duties as black women. Overall, I was able to garner new insights in regards to the idea of *other mothering* and *maternal ministry*. The next section of this study will provide a more in-depth discussion of the themes and general conclusions of the study.

## 5 CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECCOMENDATIONS

The general purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which the role of *other mothering* functions in two black churches in Metropolitan Atlanta. This study seeks to understand how the everyday experiences of black women can be portrayed through the role of mothering, how ideas about faith and the bible impact these women's ministry, and whether or not these women are empowered by their ministerial roles. The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

- Where and how does *other mothering* function in black churches?
- How are the everyday experiences of laywomen, elders, and clergywomen in the church portrayed through the role of mothering?
- Do women's ideas about their faith and the bible impact their ministry?
- Are women empowered by their maternal ministerial roles?

Fourteen African American women 35 years of age and older were recruited for this study. The participants were between the ages of 51 and 84 years of age and are from Mt. Olive and Big Bethel. All of the participants that participated in the focus groups and interviews met the criteria for participation. Participants had to be at least 35 years old, African American, female, and a member of Mt. Olive or Big Bethel for at least five years. Participants did not have to be a biological mother to participate. All of the participants participated in focus groups. Thereafter, I chose two of the participants to participate in individual interviews. All of the focus groups were opened ended and the interviews were semi-structured. A qualitative research design was used to explore the phenomenon of *other mothering* and how these black women's lived experiences involve everyday mothering.

After analyzing the data, there were seven themes that arose from the two focus groups and two one-on-one interviews. When assessing the ways that *other mothering/maternal ministry* may show up in black churches, two themes arose: love, mothering, and ministry and teachers are ministers too. When the participants discussed their everyday experiences both past and present,

other daughters to other mothers and the intersection of church, community and family were two emergent themes. When participants discussed their ideas about faith and the bible, the theme of servanthood and being Christ-like emerged. Finally, as I sought to understand whether participants were empowered by their other mothering roles, women ordained by God and affirmed in the bible were two themes that emerged.

This chapter will be divided into four parts. The first section is the discussion of the themes in relation to the literature and theoretical framework that was discussed in Chapter 1. The second section is the implications of the study. The third section is the recommendations for future research. Finally, the study's conclusion will be discussed.

## **5.1 Discussion**

### *Other Mothering in the Church*

Due to the limited literature on *other mothering* and the absence of literature on *maternal ministry*, this discussion draws from major ideas from the literature to substantiate the study's claims and findings. In understanding the ways that the participants perform *other mothering* roles, I asked the participants to define mothering and ministry at two separate points in the focus groups. However, as the focus groups progressed, I learned that for these women, motherhood is a form of ministry and can be defined as such. Defining motherhood as a type of ministry may add a very nuanced interpretation of mothering. Yet, it is important to note that how black women define and perform mothering may vary and continue to evolve. Collins (2000) explains, "as U.S. Black women's work and family experiences varied during the transition from slavery to the post-World War II political economy, how Black women define, value, and shape black motherhood as an institution shows comparable diversity" (p.190). *Other mothering* stems from West African practices that developed during the period of enslavement and these maternal practices have been passed on to women of Mt. Olive and Big Bethel. Yet, few would categorize mothering as a form of

ministry. However, Kyla of Mt. Olive quickly juxtaposed the two ideas when I asked participants to define motherhood, essentially reflecting on its very complex and diverse nature. She stated:

I see the role of motherhood, I guess, as a role that's fulfilled through caring and nurturing, leading, teaching, and just showing of anyone from zero, and really even up through mature years, that ministry to anyone in those age -- in that age group, and it's a continued role. I, myself, see motherhood as a role that I've been in, physically, having birthed two children. And it's been an ongoing mode of leading, and teaching, and showing the right way, right from wrong, primarily first leading them to God.

Motherhood as previously stated was defined as being nurturing, compassionate and loving by a number of participants and ministry was defined as servanthood, imparting teachings about the bible and being like Christ. Yet, mothering may be understood and defined in many ways. However, "love, mothering, and ministry" is an intersection that can represent a Christ-figure or someone walking in the footsteps of Christ. The participants feel that they are able to follow Jesus's ministry through mothering. Thus, the participants have a relationship with Jesus that directly correlates with their mothering roles. Georgina discussed the messages she received from Jesus to be a servant, as well as Sarina who explained that black mothers must maintain Christ-like qualities to evangelize. Interestingly, these two participants saw this connection on their own and while the relationship between black women and Jesus is not a new idea in literature, it was a new idea to many of the participants. Grant (1989) contends that Jesus has been a "divine co-sufferer" and in history, black women "identified with Jesus because they believed that Jesus identified with them" through his suffering and crucifixion which was similar to their rape and sexual oppression (p. 212). Thus, as co-sufferers, black women must also be co-servants and for these participants, that involves ministering through their maternal roles with the spirit of love.

*Teachers are ministers too*

After understanding how the participants define and understand mothering and ministry, the participants discussed exactly how this role presents itself. Ministering does not have to involve leadership or a pastoral position. When examining the ministry of black women, it is important to encompass a “broad range of Christian service within and beyond church walls that is aimed at spiritual, physical, and social regeneration and transformation” (Gilkes; 2001, p.198). With the exception of one participant, none of the participants take on a leadership position in the church as a pulpit minister. However, as educators they are ministers in their own right. Whether in the church community or secular environment, all of the participants took on some type of educational role. However, for most of these women, this was one of the only roles they have been afforded to have. As the literature has proven, despite black women’s “importance in the life of the church, the offices of preacher and pastor of churches in historic black churches remain a male preserve and are not generally available to women” (Lincoln & Mamiya; 1990, p.275). However, women did take on various roles in the church such as nurses, clerks, and vacation bible school directors just to name a few of their positions (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The literature explains that one of the historical roles that women took on were directors of vacation bible school. In correlation with the literature are the study’s findings.

Teaching is a ministry that can take place both inside and outside of the church. Rosanne stated:

My teachers were my Sunday school teachers. My teachers were the ones that I saw in the neighborhood who spoke to me. Teachers that we saw not on Sunday but through the week who was concerned about your grades at school. Teachers who would tell you to tie up them shoe strings.

For many of the participants, I learned that teaching is a job that they take on both inside and outside of the church. Marian J., Marion R., and Georgina are all teachers in the church and in

secular environments and they find their teaching is a form of ministry because they impart lessons about God all while nurturing children into being more responsible adults. This nurturing and development takes place in vacation bible school, children's church, Sunday school, the acolyte-training program, and children's church. Yet, from the participant's discussion, children seem to get more attention in these programs than adults and it is important to also teach and minister to adults and the parents of the children in such programs. Rosanne stated:

One thing I tell the youth ministry here at this church, stop bringing children out sending them back home, and don't talk to the parents...If your going to teach them children, you've got to teach the parent...You've got to bring that parent out and tell them what's going on with that child. Don't just leave it to that child. Let the child show but teach the parents to.

Maternal ministers are responsible for teaching parents the principles of the bible, as they are their children. They are also responsible for teaching young mothers how to be better mothers and potentially *other mothers*. Lois explained, "All of us are obligated to help these young mothers who don't yet have what we have in our hearts...that's a vital part of our lives, being a mother." Teaching about the biblical text and teaching about morality and how to go in the "way the bible said they should go" are two components of *maternal ministry* that may characterize *other mothering* (Lois).

#### *Other daughters to other mothers*

All of the participants in some way or another moved from *other daughters* to *other mothers*. Much of the research on *other mothers* has focused on church mothers. The intent of this research study was to acknowledge women who mother in churches without necessarily having the distinguished role of a church mother. However, I found in my focus groups not only were many of the participants on mothers boards but much of their influence as *other daughters* came from church mothers, who were older women who acted as mother figures to these women. According to Gilkes (2001), "Baptist and Methodist Church mothers tend to be influential and venerable elders"

(p.68). She continues, these are “women who are important for moral guidance within our congregations’ –but also older, venerated, Spirit-filled women who hold considerable power” (p.68). The women of Mt. Olive were sure to reflect and pay homage to the women of the past. These women were church mothers or on the mother’s board and helped to raise them and influence their roles as mothers. Church mothers as revealed in the findings directly impacted Georgina, Marian J., and Lois and as a result Lois is now on the mother’s board as well as two of the other participants from Mt. Olive. Essentially the role of church mother that “is derived from the kinship network found within black churches and black communities” is a role in which the women of Mt. Olive have been revered as prominent and influential in the life of the church (Lincoln & Mamiya; 1990, p.275). The church mothers mothered without permission, Marian J. recalled being an *other child* and having one mother who voluntarily took on this role. She stated, “She didn't ask me could I be -- could she be it, she just told me that she was going to be it.” Yet, Marian J. gained a role model.

Being in the role of an *other daughter* under church mothers was not the only one capacity that the participants became *other children*. *Other daughters* and *other mothers* become like “fictive kin” but “even when relationships are not between kin and fictive kin, African American community norms traditionally were such that neighbors cared for one another’s children” (Collins; 2000, p. 194). While all of the participants identified black women as their maternal and spiritual influences, there was one participant who’s story went beyond the African American community and race. Rosanne did not read the bible in her own home because her mother was Baptist and her father was Methodist, so they didn’t open the bible. She stated:

At the age of 11 and 12, there was a White lady in our neighborhood named Ms. Pearl Wallace, and she was old and couldn't go to her mailbox every day, so she asked my mom if she could pay me \$0.50 a week to go there and ask the mailman to give her her mail. And I would run down and put it on the pot, a flower pot, clay pot, every

evening. Well, when she got the Daily Bread and the Upper Room, I would peek into it and read it as I walked to keep from breaking it, so she wouldn't know that I was reading it.

Rosanne repeated this routine for months but she always placed the book exactly how she found it. But Ms. Wallace knew that Rosanne was reading her books as she peeked out the window every so often. Eventually, Ms. Wallace started giving her an extra quarter and those books to read. Rosanne stated, "Wow, that was other mothering right? In a spiritual way that I never even knew." Despite this woman being white, Ms. Wallace was an *other mother* and she unconsciously helped Rosanne's blood mother spiritually guide her child, who was immersed in a split household. Yet, it is important to understand that despite the prominence of *other mothering* in the black community, this phenomenon is cross cultural and maternal values may be passed on to *other daughters* outside of its traditional understandings (Collins, 2000).

#### *The Intersection of Church, Community, and Family*

As learned from Rosanne's experience with Ms. Wallace, spiritual mothering has the power to show up outside of one's church and family but in one's neighboring community as well. I began this research study looking specifically at *other mothering* in religious environments but as the participants revealed spiritual mothering can show itself in the church, community, and family. Essentially, there is an intersection between the three aforementioned domains. As participants discussed their church lives, they reflected on their family lives and their work in the community. Sarina as gathered from the findings indicated clear links between her responsibility to spiritually mother to those of Mt. Olive, those on the streets, and those in her family. Yet, as indicated by Brown (2000), in the first chapter of her text she explains that she believes, "historical and social elements of African American spirituality and religion, the black family, and the black extended family (community) as the fundamental elements for development of African American theology and ethics, which are intergenerationally transmitted" (p. 20). The religious teachings that the



participants learned in their churches were almost always practices in their homes and communities. Lynette who works on the kitchen ministry, youth ministry, acts as a caretaker of three children outside of the church, and reaches out to those in the community stated, "We're trying to get the children involved just like we were when we were coming up, teach them the word of God, and teach them how to act in church and behave in church like we were brought up." An *other mother's* job to these participants is to grab the lost children in the family and community and bring them into the church as they were taught to be. Georgina stated:

These children that we're talking about are coming to the church, because some of the mothers are keeping their children out of the churches, whereas, you know, in our times, even if -- even if you didn't do what you were supposed to do, you know that you had to put your child in somebody's church.

Echoing similar sentiments were Sarina and Rosanne. Sarina discussed ministering to those in public places and Rosanne explained that *other mothers* must do a better job of teaching children to stand on the promises of God as she was taught. She stated, "The word of God says if I plant the seed, you will water it, and God will give the increase. Stand on the word and promises that God has done. If we get back to this, we'll do much better." I believe that these women's comments are directly reflective of what Brown described as an intergenerational transmission of spiritual values, which is taking place in three complex domains. Brown (2000) notes, "In a majority of instances the black churches, the black family, and the black extended family have been able to provide and nurture the spiritual seedbed for development of mores and values" (p. 23). As the participants relayed "the purpose of teaching relevant values and beliefs is to ensure that the majority of black children lead full and productive lives with a strong sense of personhood" (Brown; 2000, p. 23). These are values that operate in intersectional environments for the participants.

*Servanthood and Being Christ-like*

Much of the discussion on being Christ-like was discussed in the very first discussion section on other mothering in the church, where I discussed participants understanding of *other mothering* and *ministry*. However, I think it is important to expand on the participant's discussion of service and walking in the ways of Christ. Mitchem explains that one of the tasks of womanist theologians is to come up with new ways to interpret the meaning of Christ (Mitchem, 2006).

Mitchem (2006) contends:

The second challenge for Black women is we must explore more deeply the question what Christ means in a society in which class distinctions are increasing. If Christ is among "the least" then who are they? ...The third and final challenge for Black women is to do constructive Christology, a liberating one, for both the Black women's community and the larger Black community (p.72).

The participants, particularly those in the focus group at Mt. Olive described Jesus as a mother figure as we learned. However, in the second focus group the participants explained Jesus to be a radical. In both focus groups, the participants fulfilled the challenges prescribed by Mitchem in that they not only expressed what Jesus meant to them but also created a liberating Christology for themselves and the black community. Seeing Jesus as a maternal figure allows these women to aspire to the principles of Christ in his servanthood through their *other mothering roles*.

Furthermore viewing Jesus as a radical provides *other mothers* a method of relaying the gospel of Christ to young adults who struggle to accept or understand the importance of having a relationship with Christ. Concerned about why young adults are not coming to church Ruth stated, "We have a problem with the spirit with our youth today." Marion R. continued, pointing to the conservatism in the church, explaining that youth are "criticized for what they do in church." She further stated, "They're not finding their needs are being met." However, Rosanne claimed Jesus to be a radical. She stated:

He didn't fit into a mold of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and all those Jewish folk who had their law, and you had to maintain this to -- And he -- They wanted to know why he was eating with the beggars, and the prostitutes, and the -- What was this?

The rich man, went up in the tree...the tax collector and all that. Why is he eating with all those folk?

Rosanne didn't proceed to give the group a sermon but she was making a point that it is the role of *other mothers* to relay the spiritual and biblical teachings about Christ from varied perspectives. Essentially, by doing this I got the impression that these women find themselves fulfilling their service to God and one step closer to walking in the image of Christ.

*Women Ordained by God*

When asked how their ideas about their faith and the bible impacted their lives and servanthood, all of the participants expressed what they felt was their responsibility to be *maternal ministers*. They felt this to be a role given to them specifically by God and that they were chosen. Mitchem (2002) cites Davies (1985) who contends:

Mothering and healing are intricately connected and of central thematic importance ...Reflecting a distinctly Black feminist point of view, these writers reveal that Black women, at certain junctures in their lives, require healing and renewal that Black women themselves have to become the healers/mothers for each other when there is such a need.... [The writers also communicate] the important message that survival alone and persistent mothering of others cannot be considered sufficient (p. 51).

Davies (1985) continues by saying, "Such mothering among black women is reciprocal, emphasizing women's responsibilities and possibilities" (p.51).

The participants felt obligated to nurture and minister to their own children, children in the community, in the church, and their families. With the exception of one woman, all of the participants had children of their own. Sarina was the only participant who had no children.

However, as a black woman, she finds her duties no less than that of a woman who has given birth. She stated, "Even though, like I said, I'm not a biological mother, I feel just as responsible as biological mothers." Kyla in agreement with Sarina, stated:

It's an ongoing role, and a highly respected role that I think God only just places upon those who he sees fit to put it upon, and lead them in the right way to do so. It is not only just a biological role, but it's one that can touch in all realms of your life, and you're a mother to anyone.

Not only can mothering extend beyond biology but also it is a role that is given to those who are fit to fulfill it. Thus, because of this special role that was predetermined, these women are obligated to abide by their calling as best they can.

#### *Women Affirmed in the Bible*

Black's women's understanding of the bible help them to feel affirmed despite the ways in which the text constructs gender. According to Mitchem (2002), "Womanist theology attempts to help black women see, affirm, and have faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African American community" (p. 82). In both focus groups, participants explained that they study the King James Version of the bible and understand that this text speaks to a male audience or primarily makes references to men. However, because of their faith, these women understand that the words of the texts expand beyond gender. The participants feel that if the bible wasn't meant for women, then there wouldn't be so many instances where they have been protected from their harmful everyday experiences. Grant (1989) contends:

African American women claim two sources of revelation: the Bible and the wisdom born from their personal relationships with God. Both sources became lenses through which analyze their experience. The understanding of God as creator, sustainer, comforter, and liberator took on life as they agonized over their pain, and celebrated the hope that as God delivered the Israelites, they would be delivered as well (p.117).

Lynette discussed her experience being mugged right outside of her home in April of 2013. She stated:

I drove in my driveway, a young man came up behind me and asked me for my keys, demanded my keys. And when I didn't turn them over, he pepper sprayed me and knocked me to the ground. He kicked me in my head, and he kicked me in my side, and then took off with my car. And I was just totally out of it.

When Lynette arrived at the hospital, she discovered that she had communion elements in her pocket from several Sundays ago and when she checked her pocket the wine was spilled but the bread was still there and intact. Lynette said "It was the blood of Jesus that saved my life." Until this day, Lynette repeats Psalm 91 everyday for God's protection. In the King James Version of the bible this scripture begins, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (King James Version, 1987). Although this scripture can be read as if it is solely for a man, Lynette's understanding of the text and her experiences shows that a woman's safety can also be affirmed in this scripture. Thus, this participant finds her refuge in the bible and understands God as her comforter just as a man would. Sarina and Lois also find comfort in the bible. Sarina relies on Matthew 6: 33, which reads, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you" (King James Version, 1987). Lois lives by Psalm 19:14, which reads, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer" (King James Version, 1987). Despite the gendered language that may be printed prior to or succeeding these verses, these women find themselves in the bible, believing God to be speaking to them as well as men from these scriptures.

Essentially, the participants are empowered through their *other mothering* roles. *Other mothering* can essentially assist black women in attaining a sense of identity. For Georgina, this study gave an uplifting category to place herself in. Rosanne had a similar experience as Georgina, she stated:

This project has opened my eyes to remember to go back and remember and to think about what I had put away and sometimes not even to look at it in the perspective of how your studying and everything, and I can see myself just doing what god has called me to do and sharing what I had learned from growing up but never thinking that, that I'm just doing something extraordinary.

This study gave all of the participants a sense of identification but for Georgina and Rosanne, two women with two very distinct experiences as mothers, it gave them a title for themselves and a name for the work that they do that goes unnoticed. Through the role of *other mothering*, Georgina and Rosanne expressed how they have self-identified with a nuanced type of ministry. Their revelations are in correlation with the literature. Collins (2000) explains:

Motherhood can serve as a site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women's empowerment. Some women view motherhood as a truly burdensome condition that stifles their creativity, exploits their labor, and makes them partners in their own oppression. Others see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualization, status in the black community, and a catalyst for social activism (p.191).

Georgina expressed some fear in being an *other mother*, for you are making such a strong impact on someone else's life and its important not to lead them astray. On the other hand, Rosanne's goal is to let those young and old understand the need to always ask themselves, what would Jesus do? Rosanne expressed that she just wants to give back to the community. For both of these women, there are fears in being *other mothers* but these women are hopeful that those being mothered to will see Christ in them and it makes them feel good to know that they influence others through a role that has been specially set aside for them.

## 5.2 Implications

This study has several implications for women in the church who take on positions as secondary mother figures. The study has shown that black women's roles in religious environments are still understudied despite the fact that their positions expand beyond supportive roles. This study has revealed that *other mothering* is a form of preaching and teaching and that ministry is rarely understood outside of the traditional discussion of church leadership. In addition, women may find empowerment in their roles as *other mothers*. For some women, the gendered phrasing of the bible is not problematic but it is important to consider those women who still struggle to find a place for themselves in biblical and theological texts. It is important to understand that the roles of women in the church are continuing to expand. Women are conscious of their responsibilities as *other mothers* and may begin to take on more responsibility for children and adults in their everyday lives. This study will contribute to a very nuanced understanding of mothering in the black community.

This study also has implications for men who have overlooked this role who may now take it upon themselves to embrace mothers of the church who are not apart of mother's ministries as well as the *other mothers* of the community. This study also has implications for young adults and older adults who may be looking for other outlets of support when dealing with various adversities or when seeking wisdom. Due to the fact that the researcher oversampled at Mt. Olive because of accessibility, there are implications for women of other churches and of younger ages who may have a different perception of mothering, ideas about the bible, and their position in the church and community. Due to the influx of participants from Mt. Olive and the fact that all of the participants were 50 years of age and older, the data was skewed, for the majority of the participants held the same ideologies. Finally, this study has implications for scholars of biblical and theological discourse who may be more inclusive of *other mothers/maternal ministers* in their studies and discussions.

### 5.3 Recommendations

This study utilized a qualitative research design with a feminist phenomenological approach. Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations have been proposed for further research. The recommendations are:

1. Conduct this study at varying denominations outside of the Baptist and Methodist denominations
2. Examine the impact of *other mothering* on those being mothered to
3. Limit the age range to 60 years old to get a younger perception of mothering
4. Explore the experiences of women who may feel oppressed by their *other mothering* roles

*Conduct this study at varying denominations outside of the Baptist and Methodist denominations*

Due to time constraints and accessibility, only two churches were used in the study. The limited number of sites limited the denominational choices. Examining a Baptist church and a Methodist church allowed for a very narrow approach to the research which was both a benefit and limitation. I was given more time to really understand the similarities and differences between the women of these churches and spend more time with them, allowing them the full opportunity to express their lived experiences. However, women's *other mothering* experiences may be different at an African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ), a Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), a United Methodist Church (UMC), or a Presbyterian Church. Expanding this study to include the aforementioned denominations may have yielded different findings and results and would have been more inclusive of other's women's religious experiences outside of the Baptist and Methodist traditions. Future research should consider adding more denominations.

*Examine the impact of other mothering on those being mothered to*

This study explored the experiences of religious women who act as *other mothers to* children and adults. Learning these women's experiences is important because this is a rather



understudied population. However, understanding the experiences of those being mothered to is just as important. Having an *other mother* has the potential to be both encouraging and overbearing for some. It can restrict one's freedom, if that child or adult is being constantly controlled and ridiculed or it can help mold a child or adult into a better human being, preparing them for life ahead. Their experiences may vary but to understand whether an *other mother's* guidance is constructive, destructive, or both in some ways would be a beneficial component to add to this study in the future, especially when accounting for the conservatist natures of some of these churches.

*Limit the age range to 60 years old to get a younger perception of mothering*

The age range that was chosen for this study was 35 years of age and older but no one under 51 years old participated in the study. Some women may feel that this role is shown more amongst elders. However, women between the ages of 35 to 50 may have experience with the role of *other mothering* as well, although it may be very different from the older women. Future research should consider a having a very diverse age range that would mean limiting the age range even more. I suggest limiting the age to 60 years old in the future to do a comparative analysis of women's experiences between the ages of 35 and 60 to women's experiences of 60 years of age and up.

*Explore the experiences of women who may feel oppressed by their other mothering roles*

At the end of this study, the majority of the participants explained how they felt empowered by their *other mothering roles*. However, all women may not feel empowered in a role that can be forced upon them. Georgina expressed fear in taking on such a role despite her embracing this form of ministry. For black women, motherhood can be an oppressive role, due to the blame they inherit for the wayward individuals of the black community. Being a biological mother holds a lot of responsibility but adding the role of *other mother* in addition to that may make mothering a

hindrance. Future research should explore the experiences of *other mothers* who find difficulty in accepting or embracing this role.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

Based on the findings and analysis of the data, four conclusions were drawn from the study, which assists in answering the study's research questions. The conclusions are:

1. *Other mothering* had several ways of presenting itself in Mt. Olive and Big Bethel but the most apparent was through the role of teaching in both religious and secular environments that is modeled with love.
2. Women's experiences as *other mothers* are portrayed by way of an intersection between church, community, and family but their roles as *maternal ministers* are informed by their former roles as *other daughters*.
3. The participants consider their ministry as mothers as a way to fulfill their service to God and a way to walk in the footsteps of Christ.
4. The participants felt empowered by their roles as *other mothers* because they felt sent and ordained by God to take on these roles and because they find affirmation in biblical texts.

Historically, black women have been marginalized in black churches, being forced to take on supportive roles and positions that place them behind men instead of beside them. Yet, mothering has and continues to be a dignified position in the church. However, outside of the mother's ministry, the intricacies of mothering have not been examined. Thus, *other mothering* is a rather understudied topic. This study sought out the women of Mt. Olive and Big Bethel to explore the ways that the women of these churches identify with the role of *other mothering*. The participants in the study were very open to the exploring the idea of *other mothering* and how this phenomenon has functioned in each of their lives, informing their ministries. From the participants, I gathered that *other mothering* is really about love and compassion that should be projected into the community, the church, and the home. Brown (2000) asserts, "In my personal home and now in my

own, *agape* love is applied as the norm in each situation of our social context” (p.45). As for the participants, love should and has defined mothering in their lives. In addition, love has guided their ministries as mothers, a role that has been primarily exuded through a teaching role. As ministers, Sunday school, vacation bible school, youth trainers, cooks, community activists, and ushers, these women have acted as both formal and informal teachers, for in all of these positions they preach and teach about the bible to children and adults. However, their methods of teaching and preaching were informed by their experiences as *other daughters*.

Countless names emerged as the participants discussed their maternal influences. Church mothers were mainly those who instilled the wisdom these women needed to take on the roles as *other mothers*. Being *other daughters* was a stepping-stone to becoming *other mothers*. Participants were able to use their childhood experiences to enact mothering in their churches, communities, and families and often at the risk of being disrespected by those who did not display receptiveness to their teachings. Yet, despite the risks, the participants were seemingly motivated by their ideas about faith and the bible. The participants understand the importance of their ministry as mothers to be in correlation with their servanthood and efforts to be like Christ. These ideas are reflective of the saying, “God Don’t Like Ugly.” Brown (2000) contends, “‘God Don’t Like Ugly’ is an old saying in African American families, churches, and communities that means God does not like us to behave in ways that are not Christ-like” (p.88). Acting as Christ was such a reoccurring idea because these women find Jesus to be the ultimate servant of God and if God ordained black women to be *other mothers*, it is their job to act just as their modeled mother, Jesus. Thus, these women are empowered in knowing that this a role set aside for them and in knowing they are affirmed in the bible, which has shown itself in their everyday experiences, which is essential to understanding and practicing a liberative theology.

In closing, *other mothering* is not a new phenomenon but a rather understudied model of mothering. This study was a conscious effort to understand how ministry can be portrayed through

mothering. In addition, it sought to tell the stories of a group of individuals whose stories are worth incorporating in biblical and theological texts. Mitchem (2002) explains, "A main focus within contemporary theology is the recovery and restatement of the subjugated strands of human meaning, particularly those of women and people of color" (p.37). With this study, these women have found a new way to self identify as women of God, essentially becoming emerged into a liberating phenomenon. At the end of the focus groups, Sarina said, "I feel empowered and liberated. I feel both of them, yeah, because I'm a child of the king. He leads -- He guides me. He directs my path." All of the participants echoed this sentiments. Marion R., said that women's power "comes from God not from men." From the conversations during the focus groups, the participants concurred with this idea. *Other mothering* has become identified as a way that these participants found meaning for themselves in their church homes and one component of their womanhood that they find liberation in from God.

However, there is more research to be conducted on *other mothering*. While *other mothering* lends power to women, for they have the ability and liberation to self-name and identify with a ministry that is exclusive to women, it can also be a rather oppressive position. Mitchem (2002) explains, "Womanist theology opposes all oppression based on race, sex, class, and sexual preference,...also physical disability and caste" (p.60). In the case of this study, these women were conscious of women's historical marginalization in the church, yet they seemed to overlook the sexism in their physical environments and in the bible. They look past the gendered language in the bible, and focused closely on the message of the King James Version of the text instead of the text's intended audience, which are men. Despite they ways in which this role of *other mothering* can empower women, typically mothering is viewed as a domestic role. Thus, these women can be viewed as remaining complacent in a subordinate role. If these women ignore sexism in the church and bible, future generations of women may internalize these same ideologies that can be damaging to one's faith and understanding of biblical messages. Thus, I think there are benefits and potential

consequences of identifying as an *other mother* when one is silent on issues of gender constructions and binaries in the church.

At the conclusion of this study, I understood *other mothering* as a ministry as well as a natural servanthood. Essentially, *other mothers* are able to compensate for the shortcomings of their pastors and other male clergy as well as for parents who have fallen short of spiritually nurturing their children. However, while these women are reacting to their own neglect, they are also responding to those who feel neglected in their church, families, and communities. *Other mothering* has the potential to become a recognized ministry and the potential to positively impact the lives of children and adults through its spiritual healing. However, one must remain conscious of the potentiality of the oppressive realities that may be associated with this role. Yet, this phenomenon must be validated both within and outside of the church for it to fully saturate black communities and heal lost and developing spirits.

## REFEERENCES

- Berryman, P. (n.d.). Liberation Theology. *Global Christian*. Retrieved from <http://www.globalchristians.org/politics/2/Liberation%20Theology.pdf>.
- Big Bethel A.M.E. Church. (2013, March 25). *Our Church*. Retrieved from <http://www.bigbethelame.org/home/>.
- Boyce Davies, Carol. (1985). Mothering and Healing in Recent Black Women's Fiction. *Sage*. 2 (1): 41-43.
- Butler, A. (2007). *Women in the Church of God in Christ*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Cannon, K. (1995). *Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Clark Hine, D. (1986). Lifting the Veil, Shattering the Silence: Black Women's History in Slavery and Freedom. *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future*. Ed. D. Clark-Hine. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Coleman, M. (2008). *Making a Way Out of No Way*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Coleman, M. (2013). *Ain't I a Womanist Too?: Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Collins, P.H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge.
- Cone, J. (1970). *A Black Theology of Liberation*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Cone, J. (2008). *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2011). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

- Edwards, A. (2000). Community Mothering: The Relationship Between Mothering and The Community Work of Black Women. *Journal of Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*. 2 (2):87-100.
- Fitzgerald, S.T. & Spohn, R.E. (2005, December). Pulpits and Platforms: The Role of the Church in Determining Protest among Black Americans. *Social Forces*, 84 (2): 1015-1048.
- George, Timothy. (2012). Southern Baptists Long Journey. *A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*. 226 (1): 16-18.
- Gibson, Jimmy. (2011, July 10). Sermon. *Amazing Grace*.
- Gibson, Jimmy. (2011, September 30). Sermon. *How to Make it Through Tough Times*.
- Gibson, Jimmy. (2013, April, 28). Sermon. *Press On*.
- Gilkes, C.T. (2001). *If It Wasn't for the Women*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Grant, Jacquelyn. (n.d.). "Black Women and the Church." *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. Ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith. New York, The Feminist Press, 1982. 141-152.
- Grant, Jacquelyn. (1989). *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press.
- Green, R. (1995). Gender Parity in the Black Church. Daughters of Thunder Struggling for Two Centuries. *Daughters of Sarah*. 21 (3): 35-38.
- Harley, S. (1982). "Beyond the Classroom: The Organizational Lives of Black Female Educators in the District of Columbia, 1890-1930." *Journal of Negro Education* 5 1 (3): 254-269.
- Harris, F.C. (1994, February). Something Within: Religion as a Mobilizer of African American Political Activism. *The Journal of Politics*, 56 (1): 42-68.
- Higginbotham, E. B. (1993). *Righteous Content: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Howard University Press.
- Humez, J.M. (1993). In Search of Harriet Tubman's Spiritual Autobiography. *NWSA Journal*. 5(2):

162-182.

Informed Consent Process. (2012). Georgia State University. Retrieved October 23, 2012, from <http://www.gsu.edu/research/41653.html>.

James, S.M. (1993). Mothering: A Possible Black Feminist Link to Social Transformation. Eds. *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*. S.M. James and A.A. Busia. New York: Routledge: 32-44.

Kaylor, Brian T. (2010). Gracious Submission: The Southern Baptist Convention Press Portrayals of Women. *Journal of Gender Studies*. 19(4): 335-348.

Lincoln, Eric and Mamiya, Lawrence. (1990). *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham: Duke University Press.

McAdam, D. (1982). *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency Between 1930-1970*. University of Chicago Press.

Mitchem, S. (2002). *Introducing Womanist Theology*. New York: Orbis Books.

Morris, Aldon. (1981). Black Southern Student Sit-In Movement: An Analysis of Internal Organization. *American Sociological Review*. 46: 744-67.

Morris, Aldon. (1984). *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing For Change*. Free Press.

Murray, S.R. & Harrison, D.D. (1981). Black Women and the Future. *Psychology of Women*. 81 (6): 113-122.

Official Website of the Southern Baptists. (2013, April 25). *About Us: Meet Southern Baptists*. Retrieved from <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/default.asp>.

Phillips, L. (2006). *The Womanist Reader*. Layli Phillips (Ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Progressive National Baptist Convention. (2013, April 25). *History of the PNBC*. Retrieved from <http://www.pnbc.org/PNBC/History.html>.

Ross, R. (2003). *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*. Minneapolis:



- Fortress Press.
- Rubin I. & Rubin H. (2012). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Saldana, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Taylor, R.J., Lincoln, K.D. & Chatters, L.M. (2005, October). Supportive Relationships with Church Members Among African Americans. *Family Relations*, 54 (4): 501 -511.
- The King James Version Bible. (1987). *Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (2013, April 25). *History of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.* Retrieved from <http://www.nationalbaptist.com/about-us/our-history/index.html>.
- Thomas, L. (1998). Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm. *Cross Currents* 48(1):1.
- Stack, C.D. (1974). *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Visible Link, P. (2003). African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. *Black First, Second Edition*, 536-541.
- Walker, Alice. (1983). *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Wallace, M. (1990). "Variations on Negation and the Heresy of Black Feminist Creativity." *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. New York: Meridian Books. 52-67.
- Walls, C. T. (1992). The Role of Church and Family Support in the Lives of Older African Americans. *Generations*, 16 (3): 33.
- Ward, E.G. (2005). Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the U.S. Black Church. *Culture, Health, & Sexuality*, 7 (5): 493-504.

Williams, D. (1990). "James Cone's Liberation: Twenty Years Later." *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition*. New York: Orbis Books.

Williams, D. (2006). "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices (1986)." *The Womanist Reader*. Ed. Lyle Phillips. New York: Routledge. 17-125.

Williams, M. (1974). *Community in a Black Pentecostal Church*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Wilmore, G.S. (1998) *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*. New York: Orbis Books.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Informed Consent

#### Georgia State University

#### Department of African American Studies

Title: Maternal Ministry, Other Mothering, and Finding Power for Women in the Black Church: A Phenomenological Exploration

Principal Investigator: Dr. Makungu Akinyela

Student Investigator: Shauntia Lovett

#### I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to examine black women who act as mother figures in the church. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a member of Mt. Olive Baptist Church or Big Bethel A.M.E. You must be at least 35 years old, African American and female. You must also have been a member of one of these churches for at least 5 years to participate. You do not have to be a blood mother or foster parent to be in this study. A total of 20 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require two to three hours of your time. You will only be needed for responses for one to two days either in the month of February or March.

#### II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will participate in a one-time focus group that will last for 2 hours. You may also participate in a one-hour interview. All focus groups and interviews will be audio recorded. The researcher will conduct the focus groups at the churches. She will conduct the interviews at the participants' homes or church in the month of February or March. You will interact with other participants and the researcher during the study. The focus groups will begin after you have consented to the study and completed a short survey. The researcher will contact you if you are chosen for an individual interview. At the end of the focus groups, all participants will receive a \$10 gift card or lunch provided by the researcher.

#### III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you do in a normal day of life. Involvement in this study may cause you to feel responsible in working with children or adults more often at your church. As a result, you may feel unwanted pressure.

#### IV. Benefits:

Involvement in this study may or may not benefit you. The study will be eye opening. This study may also change some of your beliefs about your church. You may learn new things about yourself that you've never noticed. Overall, the researcher hopes that you gain useful information about yourself and role in your church.

V. Voluntary Involvement and Withdrawal:

Involvement in this study is at your own will. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to quit at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. However, the gift card or lunch will only be given if participants finish the focus groups.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. PI. Makungu Akinyela and the student investigator will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection OHRP). We will use numbers rather than your name on study record. The information you provide will be put in a locked cabinet and on the researcher's laptop with a passcode. Your name and other facts that identify you will not appear when we present this study or publish results. You will not be identified personally and findings will be summarized in-group form. Participants will be asked not to discuss the focus groups. However, the researcher cannot control if participants discuss focus groups.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Makungu Akinyela 404-413-5141 or at [makinyela@gsu.edu](mailto:makinyela@gsu.edu) and the student researcher at 678-428-9700 or at [slovett2@student.gsu.edu](mailto:slovett2@student.gsu.edu) if you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Integrity at 404-413-3513 or [svogtner1@gsu.edu](mailto:svogtner1@gsu.edu) if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this study and be audio recorded, please sign below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix B: Demographic Survey**

Name:

Race:

Age:

Church of Membership:

Length of Membership:

Educational Background:

Position in the Church:

Are you a biological mother?

### Appendix C: Instrument for Focus Group

Title: Maternal Ministry, Other Mothering, and Finding Power for Women in the Black Church: A Phenomenological Exploration

#### Introduction by Facilitator

Hello, my name is Shauntia Lovett and I am a graduate student in the African American Studies program at Georgia State University. Thank you for your time to participate in a focus group on black women's religious experiences. This focus group is part of my master's thesis in which I am looking at the ways *other mothering* functions in the black church. *Other mothering* may be defined as women who care for and nurture children and adults who they did not biologically give birth to. My goal is to examine how this type of mothering functions in religious environments. I want to understand how black women use their maternal instincts to minister to church parishioners.

You are a group of women 35 and older from [church name] who may identify as *maternal ministers*. I would like to hear about the ways women are perceived in your church. I also want to know what roles and duties woman take on in your place of worship.

During this focus group I will ask questions and facilitate a conversation that will help us explore your commitments to the church. I want to learn about your everyday experiences and how your faith informs your ministry. I also want to learn if you feel empowered or uplifted by your position at [church name].

Please note that this session will be recorded to ensure that I adequately capture all of your ideas during the conversation. However, the comments from the focus groups will remain confidential and your name will not be attached to any comments you make. Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### Focus Group Questions for Those Women who act as Second Mothers To Church Parishioners

1. Lets do a quick round of introductions. Can each of you tell the group your name, and how long you have been a member at [church name]?
2. What is your role in the church? Do you hold any positions in the church?
  - a. If so, how did you come to take on that position?
  - b. If not, in what ways do you demonstrate a commitment to the church?
3. How do you define mothering or motherhood?
4. How many of you are biological mothers?
  - a. Probe: Describe your role as a mother.
5. How many of you do not have any biological children but still care for or have cared and nurtured those whom you did not give birth to?
  - a. Probe: Describe your role as a mother
6. When you hear the phrase "other mothering," what comes to mind?
 

**Facilitator:** Explain what *other mothering is* and where it stemmed.

  - a. Are there any questions about this phrase?

- b. Now that you understand the phrase, would you say you identify as an *other mother*?
  - c. Probe: Who were the *other mothers* in your lives?
- 7. How do you define ministry?  
**Facilitator:** Give a definition of ministry.
- 8. How do you spiritually engage with parishioners (children and adults) ?  
  - a. Probe: Does your relationship with children, young adults, and older adults differ?
- 9. Has the bible or your faith informed your commitment to the church?  
  - a. Are there any biblical passages that you would like to share that have helped guide your life and your responsibilities to the church?
  - b. Where do you see yourself in biblical texts?
- 10. How do your everyday lived experiences inform your interpretation of the bible and the ways you impart lessons about the bible?
- 11. Do you think what you do at the church can be described as a type of ministry?  
  - a. If so, explain.
  - b. If no, explain.
- 12. Do you think there is a connection between mothering and ministering?  
  - a. How and in what ways?
- 12. In what ways do you think *other mothering* plays out here at [church name]?
- 14. Do you feel empowered and liberated in your church and in your position whether it be an appointed position or not?
- 15. Is there any thing else we haven't discussed yet that you think is important to explore as we explore the links between *other mothering* and ministry?
- 16. Now that we are at the end of the focus group, would you say you identify as a *maternal minister*?  
  - a. Why or why not?

**Thank you so much for your time!**

## Appendix D: Instrument for Individual Interviews

### Questions for Women Who Were Selected for a One on One Interview

**Facilitator:** Thank you for taking the time out to meet with me again for my research study. I contacted you because I was particularly intrigued by your story and wanted to learn more about you and your experiences at [church name]. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers and I am completely open to anything you want to tell me.

1. First I want to know if you have any reflections on the focus groups. Is there anything that you wanted to discuss but didn't get a chance to?
2. Is mothering a component of your everyday life? Explain.
3. After our discussion on *other mothering*, how do think *other mothering* coincides with your position at [church name]?
4. Do parishioners seek out guidance from you? In what ways do you provide spiritual guidance to the children, young adults, and older adults?
5. Do you ever find yourself preaching or teaching from the bible? Do you ever find yourself imparting life lessons to those around you?
6. Is being able to minister a calling or just a method of servanthood for you?
7. What is your most prized experience in working with the parishioners at [name of church]?
8. How has this experience impacted your religiosity? Do you feel that you now have more responsibility in the church as an *other mother*?
9. Explain the ways in which you feel inspired by *others mothers*.
10. Take this time to discuss any thing that we have neglected discuss that you want to add.

**Thank you for your participation.**



## **Appendix E: Church Bulletin Post**

### **A New Research Study is Underway and Your Participation is Needed!**

Shauntia Lovett, a graduate student at Georgia State University is seeking to incorporate [church name] in her research study, entitled "Maternal Ministry, Other Mothering, and Finding Power for Women in the Black Church: A Phenomenological Exploration."

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to examine black women who act as mother figures in the church.

**Requirements:** Must be a member of Mt. Olive Baptist Church or Big Bethel A.M.E. for at least 5 years, 35 years of age or older, African American and female. You do not have to be a biological parent to participate.

**You will participate in...**a two-hour focus group and potential one-hour interview in the month of February or March and you will only be needed for one to two days.

**Contact Shauntia Lovett for more information at 678-428-9700 or [slovett2@student.gsu.edu](mailto:slovett2@student.gsu.edu).**

### **Appendix F: Recruitment Flyer**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to provide a space for other mothers from diverse backgrounds in religious discourse. It also seeks to give voice to black women who spiritually nurture congregants who are not their biological children.

**Participant Demographics:** Must be 35 years of age and up, African American, female, and a member of Mt. Olive Baptist Church or Big Bethel A.M.E for at least five years.

**Requirements:** Participation in a 2 hr. focus group and potential one on one hr. long interview in the month of February or March.

**Researcher's Contact Information:**

**Affiliated Institution:** Georgia State University

**Email:** [slovett2@student.gsu.edu](mailto:slovett2@student.gsu.edu)

**Phone:** 678-428-9700