Self-Perceptions of Senior African Americans Who Participate in Formal Volunteering

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Self-Perceptions of Senior African Americans Who Participate in Formal Volunteering

Abstract
An ever-growing resource in America today is our aging population. One out of every five adults will be age 65 or older by 2030. Indeed, Americans are living longer now than at any other time in history, and they have better health, education and a lifetime of experience to offer when volunteering. This study used the Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work as a theoretical framework. The Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work includes three types of resources: human capital, social capital and cultural capital. Although a large body of literature has documented that those factors are present in the general population, few studies have focused on the experiences of senior African American volunteers who are successfully engaged in secular, formal volunteering activities. The results of the dissertation show that social and cultural capitals are the most significant resources for recruitment and retention of high-low socioeconomic status African American volunteers. Also found are cultural tendencies of African Americans that are primarily focused on activities for the family and kinship network, even if participants are less fortunate themselves. The implications provide information for the field of volunteerism as it relates to African American volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and secular companies wishing to be more diverse in their recruitment strategies.

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Self-Perceptions of Senior African Americans Who Participate in Formal Volunteering

By

Monique C. Adams

Submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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Dedication

The author would like to extend her deepest gratitude and thank you to my Dissertation Chair Dr. Michael Wischnowski for his encouragement; wisdom, commitment, and outstanding leadership that helped motivate me. A special thank you to my committee member Dr. Karyl Mammano, thoughtful comments, recommendations, and stepping in at the last minute helped me to complete this scholarly work. To Dr. Ruth Harris and Betsy Christiansen for the support you provided me in the Ed.D Executive leadership doctoral program. More specifically, I would like to thank Dr. William Daniels for constantly pushing and encouraging me, especially when things got rough. It is with much appreciation I would like to thank all of the volunteer coordinators who collaborated with me. In addition, I want to give a special thanks to the *Grandmothers in the Trenches, Getting Down To Business, and Setting the Record Straight* participants for giving me the opportunity to listen and share their experiences in formal volunteering. To all those who continue to remain in the trenches, to my dearest friends, I would like to thank Patricia Johnson, Maril Nowak, Laura Phonharath, Patricia Culver and Jenny Avedisian who, in one way or another, shared in this experience with me. Finally, to Emma Holley my mother whose love, pride, and encouragement made it possible for me to be able to complete this chapter in my life.
Biographical Sketch

Abstract

An ever-growing resource in America today is our aging population. One out of every five adults will be age 65 or older by 2030. Indeed, Americans are living longer now than at any other time in history, and they have better health, education and a lifetime of experience to offer when volunteering. This study used the Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work as a theoretical framework. The Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work includes three types of resources: human capital, social capital and cultural capital. Although a large body of literature has documented that those factors are present in the general population, few studies have focused on the experiences of senior African American volunteers who are successfully engaged in secular, formal volunteering activities. The results of the dissertation show that social and cultural capitals are the most significant resources for recruitment and retention of high-low socioeconomic status African American volunteers. Also found are cultural tendencies of African Americans that are primarily focused on activities for the family and kinship network, even if participants are less fortunate themselves. The implications provide information for the field of volunteerism as it relates to African American volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and secular companies wishing to be more diverse in their recruitment strategies.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

For the last two decades, there has been a call to tap the human resource potential of the growing older adult population in the United States on behalf of non-profit and government sector volunteer programs (Center for Health Communications, 2004; Chambre, 1993; Freedman, 2002; Powers, 1998). Demographics clearly indicate that seniors are the fastest growing population in the United States, as is true in many other parts of the world. In 2009, the U.S. Administration on Aging reported 39.6 million persons 65 years or older. The U.S. Census Bureau defined this demographic as baby boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). The US population age 65 and over is expected to double in size within the next 25 years. By 2030, almost 1 in 5 Americans, some 72 million, will meet this milestone. By 2050, the older population is projected to number 86.7 million (Merck Institute of Aging and Health, 2004). Although there has been considerable research on volunteering in the United States, most of it has focused on the general population but not as specifically to African Americans.

Instead, volunteering is important to the nation’s economy. In the year 2001, 83.9 million American adults in the United States had devoted 15.5 billion volunteer hours within the past 12 months to a formal volunteer organization. Their volunteer time was equivalent to a total value of $239.2 billion dollars. This unpaid labor is equal to 9 million full-time employees (Independent Sector, 2001). These estimates, from the seventh biennial study of giving and volunteering from the Independent Sector (Toppe,
Kirsh, & Michel, 2002), underlined the tremendous importance of formal volunteering for the U.S. economy and society. In fact, within the U.S. economy, the non-profit sector consisted nearly exclusively in formal volunteer work (Tilly & Tilly, 1994; Van Til, 1998).

Caro and Bass (1995) suggested recruitment of those who are willing and able to volunteer, who are well-educated, relatively young, and in good health. However, Johnson and Schaner (2006) valued formal volunteering activities among older adults at $44.3 billion in 2002. It has been pointed out that recruitment of retirees is a cost-effective strategy because they volunteer more hours once they are engaged, 104 hours against a median of 52 hours for all age groups (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007).

Beyond the monetary contribution that volunteer work adds to the non-profit and government sectors, volunteerism by older adults has associated benefits and cost savings for human services and for individual volunteers. Organizations relying on older adult volunteers for assistance are able to enhance their programs. Thus, findings and keeping volunteers is essential to maximizing the benefits and minimizing the costs to both agencies and individuals.

Wilson (2000) defined volunteering as “any activity in which time is freely given to benefit another person, group, or organization” (p. 215). This definition covers a wide range of activities. Wilson and Musick (1997) were the first to make a distinction between formal and informal volunteering in their integrated theory of volunteer work. This distinction is important because volunteering can occur within two types of settings: first in an informal setting, which is unpaid, unorganized caregiving provided to personal networks of neighbors, friends, family members; and second, formal volunteering refers
to activities that are unpaid but instead, structured through an organization or a group where individuals offer their time, service or skills within the confines of an organization (Carr, 2001). Despite their efforts at distinguishing between these two kinds of volunteering, much of the current research has been biased toward formal volunteering. The majority of research and policy focus has been on the participatory cultures of the middle class and affluent populations rather than informal groups, whose volunteer activities are not counted as important (Williams, 2003). While some individuals contribute time and their physical presence to volunteering, others donate money as a way to volunteer, essentially substituting money for time. In some cases, it is easier to give money when the volunteering activity is not within reach, such as in natural disasters, family and work obligations. However, not everyone appears to have the same access or resources to pursue volunteering opportunities.

Research suggested that structural barriers prevent some older adults from volunteering. These barriers include lack of knowledge about volunteering opportunities, incurring personal expenses, lack of skills and transportation, lack of clarity of expectations, assignment of menial tasks, time constraints, and inadequate volunteer management (Caro & Bass, 1995; Center for Health Communications, 2004). In addition to acknowledging structural barriers, compelling literature documented the positive association between socioeconomic advantages and volunteering (Choi, 2003; Jirovec & Hyduk, 1998; Zedlewski & Schaner, 2005). As documented by McBride (2007), volunteering can be inaccessible to older adults who need to earn an income, who provide caregiving, or who have certain disabilities. All of these circumstances were more common among older adults of lower socioeconomic status. The research suggested that
people with fewer social and economic resources might be unable to overcome these barriers in order to move into volunteer roles. The emphasis of the dissertation study was on senior African Americans who may or may not have had to overcome barriers to find access to formal volunteering opportunities.

**African American Volunteerism in the United States**

In the current literature, the stereotypical profile of volunteers is of a white, middle-aged, highly educated woman with a secure income, who attends church regularly and is altruistically motivated (Davis-Smith, 1993). Other literature indicated those older adults are likely to be the young-old (under age 75), females having better education, higher income, better health, and religious affiliation who are more likely to participate in volunteering (Caro & Bass, 1995; Herzog & Morgan, 1993; Kim & Hong, 1997; Tang, 2006; Wilson & Musick, 1997).

However, recent demographic and employment shifts have challenged this profile. Women, the traditional stewards of voluntary activity, are becoming more integrated into the employment sector. This clearly impinges on the availability of free time to volunteer, a motivation frequently cited amongst non-working women. Further, the fall in church attendance has removed a vital source of volunteers. Concomitantly, members of groups that have lower levels of participation—for example, unemployed people, older people, and people from ethnic groups—are increasing in numbers, and projections indicate that this trend will continue. Government proposals aimed to promote volunteering among these groups, and thus redress the recruitment problem experienced by many organizations as they meet ever-increasing demands for services.
As the older population grows larger, it will also grow more diverse. The baby boomer population will be more racially and ethnically diverse than their elders. According to the 2002 Current Population Survey (CPS), more than four out of five persons older than the boomers are white non-Hispanic (80%), as compared to three out of four (74%) white non-Hispanic boomer elders. The boomers are particularly more likely than their elders to be Hispanic (10% versus 6%) or African American–non-Hispanic (11% versus 9%). Future projections indicated that as part of the nation’s expanding minority population, the African American population is expected to increase from 40.7 million to 65.7 million by 2050, and the number of African American elders will increase from 3.1 million to 9.9 million (Administration on Aging, 2009; Bowles & Kingston, 1998; U.S. Census Bureau News, 2008). Given these projections, some believed that these older adults may have a positive influence on society through civic and social engagement (Hendricks & Cutler, 2004; Hinterlong, Morrow-Howell, & Rozario, 2007; Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003; Morrow-Howell, Kinnevy, & Mann, 1999). In light of this large, untapped pool of potential volunteers, it is important to understand their participation in the volunteer workforce.

There are differential rates of volunteering among ethnic groups, with older adults of color volunteering at lower rates than whites, especially in secular, formal voluntary organizations. Several studies suggested that African Americans volunteer less often than whites (Hodgkinson & Weitzman 1994; Jackson 2001; Musick, Wilson, & Bynum 2000). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) reported that whites continue to volunteer at a higher rate than did blacks: 28.2% to 20.3%, respectively. This may be related to historic segregation, disparities in economic and health resources, as well as structural barriers
related to discrimination (McBride, 2007). However, recent findings were mixed regarding the association between volunteering and demographic factors of age, gender, race, and marital status. Age, gender, and racial differences in volunteering may have been explained by personal resources, motivation and beliefs, and social networks of volunteers (Wilson, 2000).

While there are many variables that influence volunteer group participation rates across the United States, perhaps none is as overlooked as the impact of race (Wilson, 2000). Simply put, whites volunteer more often than African Americans (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000). There have been a number of studies that attempt to explain why this racial discrepancy exists. Most of these studies have pointed to socioeconomic disparities between whites and African Americans and the negative influence of resource constraints on volunteerism. African American children are more likely than white children to live in poverty, and if they are already poor, to reside in areas of concentrated poverty (Duncan & Rodgers, 1988; Jargowsky, 1994). Additionally, there are class distinctions among adults that are specific to race and gender. Mantsios (2003) found that white males and not females have one in ten chances of being poor versus African American males and females who have a one in five chance of living in poverty. In other words, people do not choose to be poor; it is determined by what has been bestowed upon them, such as stocks, bonds, savings accounts, and other inheritances. Further, in the United States structural factors and institutional barriers have served to maintain these racially-related, resource disparities (McCloyd, 1998).

Racial differences in volunteering are more evident in the older generations than in younger cohorts because the discrimination and segregation experienced by older
African Americans have resulted in restricted access to certain types of voluntary organizations among this elderly group (Miner & Tolnay, 1998). For example, elderly African Americans reported higher levels of participation in neighborhood organizations, such as churches, school groups and adult leadership of youth groups than was reported in job-related and social service organizations (Miner & Tolnay, 1998). Historically, access to structured positions in certain types of voluntary organizations was more available to white volunteers, especially in job-related and social service organizations where whites were the dominant group (Miner & Tolnay, 1998). Some have argued that the call for increasing volunteerism among older adults ignores diverse, older populations and so threatens to further marginalize and disadvantage African Americans (Estes et al., 2001).

The socioeconomic gap between races, however, has been closing. Recent changes in societal structure have created more opportunities for African Americans to move into social areas previously inaccessible to them (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000). Professionally, African Americans continue to advance in status in educational, occupational and income sectors. A burgeoning African American middle class is emerging across the United States, with this rise attributed to their ability to push past existing color lines (Landry, 1987). On the other hand, Mantsios (2003) noted that the inequality gap between the rich and poor has been continuing to increase and that although race, gender and class act independently of each other, they, in fact, are interrelated. Further, a number of social organizations outside of the workplace have been becoming more receptive to minority membership. In fact, recent studies depicted no racial differences whatsoever in both giving and volunteering after controls for education,
income, occupational status, and being asked are considered (Clary et al. 1996; Independent Sector, 2001; Mesch et al., 2002). To date, studies have not been found that explore senior African Americans’ perceptions of how issues of human capital have affected their access to and participation in formal volunteering activities.

Despite such promising gains, to raise up an image of disappearing racial lines is perhaps overly optimistic. African Americans in the United States continue to be confronted with racism and overt discrimination (Sigelman & Welch, 1995). Noticeable gaps still exist in educational and income status between whites and African Americans, with the vast number of African Americans’ middle class jobs limited to the public sector (Musick et al., 2000). To date, little is known about the experiences of senior African Americans volunteers who are engaged in secular, formal volunteering. However, Wilson and Musick (1997) developed an Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work to explain formal volunteering, which may provide insight on senior African Americans’ access and participation.

**Theoretical Framework**

Wilson and Musick (1997) introduced the Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work categorizing resource factors that may provide access to and facilitation of volunteering activity. The Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work includes three types of resources: human capital, social capital and cultural capital.

**Human capital.** Human capital refers to those resources attached to individuals that make volunteering possible (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Three important aspects of human capital are education, income and health (Wilson, 2000), with education being one of the most significant predictors of the involvement of seniors in volunteer work
(Fischer & Shaffer, 1993). As education increases, so does volunteering activity because the more education individuals obtain, the more aware they are of social problems (Wilson, 2000). Furthermore, individuals with higher levels of education are likely to possess a wider range of skills that organizations may find desirable, such as the ability to run a meeting. Wilson (2000) found that income is positively related to volunteer participation but related to commitment. It was noted that a higher income level or greater wealth can contribute to more volunteer activity because individuals with increased financial resources may have greater ability to volunteer as potential barriers decrease, such as transportation, or the need to spend more time in paid employment. Also, related to human capital are resources and volunteering by older adults who are in good health (Herzog & Morgan, 1993; Okun, 1993; Warburton, Le Broque, & Rosenman, 1998). Cutler and Hendricks (2000) suggested that the lower level of voluntary association memberships of all older adults is largely due to the lower level of human capital as compared to other age groups. Studies that explored race and human capital were focused on those who had been marginalized due to their lack of resources (Estes, Mahakian, & Weitz, 2001; McBride, 2007; Musick & Wilson, 2000; Tang, 2006).

**Social capital.** A second determinant of volunteer behavior is social capital. Wilson and Musick (1997) asserted that social capital is supported by the idea that “individuals and groups can gain resources from their connections to one another and from the type of these connections” (p. 698). A social capital perspective argues that extensive social connections can increase volunteering opportunities (Oesterle, Johnston, & Mortimer, 2004; Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Social networks and trust foster volunteering in a number of ways. The Independent Sector (2001) reported that
people who have broad social networks are more likely to be asked to give their time and money. For instance, participation in religious institutions and service in voluntary associations involves individuals in social networks where norms of helping are shared among members. Even if members of these networks feel little internal motivation to volunteer or give money, they nonetheless are subjected to external pressure and encouragement to do so (Lee et al., 1999). Furthermore, Herzog and Morgan (1993) found that in terms of volunteering among elders both formal and informal social capital networks after retirement or entering an “empty nest” period are strong predictors of civic engagement.

However, older adults who are more separated from educational and work institutions are thus less likely to be recruited to volunteer, even though being asked is a major route to volunteering (Independent Sector, 2000). Despite superior social networks, African Americans are therefore less likely to be asked to participate in formal volunteering (Hodgkinson, 1995). As it turns out, individuals are recruited to participate in an organized volunteer effort if they are highly educated, have higher incomes, work at least part-time, are married, and have a spouse who also volunteers (Boraas, 2003; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009; Morrow-Howell, 2010).

A survey of non-volunteers asked why they were not volunteering, and 68% of African Americans said they were not asked, compare to 44% white respondents volunteers (Ferree et al., 1988). However, the fact that white Americans were more likely to be asked to volunteer than African Americans is not entirely due to their educational and occupational status (Musick et al., 2000). At every level of socioeconomic achievement, African Americans have been less likely than whites to be asked to
volunteer, and this accounts for some of the racial gap in volunteering. This topic is worthy of much study because it has to do with the question of whether or not volunteering is a pattern of racial exclusion in the voluntary sector equal to that found in the employment sector. Whites have volunteered more than African Americans because they are most likely to be recruited. Little is known about recruitment of senior African American volunteers who are participating in formal volunteering.

Volunteers have become an integral part of the non-profit and government sectors in America, making recruitment and retention important management considerations (Brudney, 2005; Hager & Brudney, 2004; McCurley & Lynch, 2005). With an increase of volunteerism, it is important to identify and understand who the volunteers are in order to facilitate recruitment of potential older and diverse volunteers, retention in volunteer service, and finally, achievement of the goals of the organizations.

**Cultural capital.** A third component of The Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work is cultural capital. Wilson and Musick (1997) described cultural capital as a sense of social responsibility or moral obligation toward those who are less fortunate and the motivation to contribute to the greater good (p. 367). A wide range of psychological research showed that cultural values and personal traits motivate volunteering. These values and traits included religious orientation and a pro-social role identity (Finkelstein, Penner, & Brannick, 2005; Piliavin, Dovidio, & Schroeder, 2005). “Generativity” was defined as taking care of others more importantly than a concern for oneself and taking on a series of social roles, such as spouse, parent, grandparent, employee, friend, mentor, advisor, and consultant (Fischer et al., 1998). It also referred to a need to give back to the
community, as well as a dispositional empathy and a sense of moral obligation to care about others.

When it comes to church organizations, African Americans volunteered more than whites. For African Americans, the church has had a more profound influence on the decision to volunteer than for their white counterparts (Ferree, Barry, & Manno, 1998). Related to this, church attendees, regardless of race, were found to choose to volunteer for their congregation’s if they possessed strong ties to fellow members or found the congregation identity to be a good fit with their expectations (Becker & Dhingra, 2001). In the past, nonprofit organizations that had sought to get African Americans support for their various campaigns have gone to the churches. “Many African Americans prefer to sponsor church programs because they are sometimes suspicious of other non-profit organizations” (Smith et al., 1999, p. 25). Thus, not surprisingly, African American volunteers tended to focus on needs more pressing in their own communities and networks (Wilson, 2000). In one survey, “African Americans were more likely than whites to say that their church influenced their decision to volunteer” (Ferree et al., 1998, p. 78). Another reason why church attendance might be a predictor of volunteering more for African Americans than for whites is in the way they are organized. “African American churches involve more of their members in the kinds of practices that foster volunteerism in the wider community” (Verba et al., 1995, p. 319). More intense involvement in the communal practices of congregation teaches African Americans the kinds of skills they need to participate in the voluntary sector. Verba et al. found that African Americans participated in more “civic acts” that teach skills (e.g., the ability to run a meeting) in church-related organizations than do whites. On the other hand, whites
engage more in civic acts than African Americans do in formal volunteering. In other words, when it comes to acquiring civic skills, African Americans get more out of church activities than whites do, and whites get more out of secular activities. Musick et al. (2000) studied the influence of church attendance among African Americans and whites and found the frequency of church attendance had a much more powerful influence on African Americans than on whites. Coincidentally, the reverse was true of frequency of attendance at voluntary association meetings, which had a more powerful influence on white than on African American volunteers (Musick et al., 2000, p. 356). In summary, African American churches tend to absorb all of its members’ time in congregational volunteer activities.

Wilson and Musick (1997) described how resource inadequacy in the areas of human, social, and cultural capital can affect lower rates in formal volunteering. The individual stock of resources changes as people age; such changes may affect volunteer participation and performance. However, what is not known is what influences senior African American volunteers regarding access and participation in secular, formal volunteering. If Wilson and Musick’s line of argument is correct, then what influences senior African Americans to participate in secular, formal volunteering? This question points to a research problem related to the perceived experiences of senior African Americans.

Research Problem

Although a large body of literature has documented that resource factors are associated with volunteering, few studies have focused on the experiences of senior African Americans who are successfully engaged in secular, formal volunteering. To
further strengthen Wilson & Musick’s (1997) Theory of Integrated Volunteer Work, this study identified the need to give voice to senior African American volunteers who have found access to and participate in formal volunteering activities. Research suggested that African Americans have a different pathway to formal volunteering based on their level of human, social and cultural capital. Getting a clearer understanding of their pathway may lead to improved access for and participation of senior African American volunteers in formal volunteering.

**Research questions.** This research study will address the following main research question and sub-questions:

What are the perceived experiences of senior African Americans who participate in secular, formal volunteering?

**Sub questions.** Four sub-questions were asked.

1. How did you acquire the skills needed to volunteer for a particular organization?
2. How did you find out about volunteering?
3. What values do you hold that volunteering helps you fulfill?
4. Before, we end our session, is there anything else you would like to tell me about volunteering?

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 identified the research problem, the significance of the problem, the theoretical framework for understanding the problem, and the set of questions guiding the research. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature and Chapter 3 presents the research design methodology, including the research questions, research variables, population and
data sample, data collection and instrument, and analysis procedures for the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings, and Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings and recommendations for research and practice.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction and Purpose

Using Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work (Wilson & Musick, 1997) as a lens, this literature review examines empirical studies focused on the three dimensions of the theory (human, social, and cultural capital) and how each is related to formal volunteerism. The literature is discussed and synthesized in order to show the need for a study of the perceived experiences of senior African Americans currently engaged in formal volunteering. The review showed that the literature is largely made up of quantitative studies and that there is a need to hear the voices of those who have apparently gained the capital needed to access and participate in formal volunteering.

Most studies included some aspect of human, social, and cultural capital, while a few studies documented just one or two of these dimensions. Human capital appeared to be the most significant predictor for access to formal volunteering. The studies in this literature review are presented in the following order: (a) those related to human capital and volunteering; (b) those related to social capital and volunteering; and (c) those related to cultural capital and volunteering.

Human Capital and Volunteering

As discussed in Chapter 1, Wilson and Musick (1997) defined human capital as “those resources attached to individuals that make productive activities possible” (p. 698). Three important aspects of human capital are education, income, and health (Wilson, 2000), with education being one of the most significant predictors of the
involvement of seniors in volunteer work (Fischer & Shaffer, 1993). Furthermore, individuals with higher levels of education are likely to possess a wider range of skills that organizations may find desirable. Research also showed that Americans with at least some college education are more apt to participate in both formal and informal volunteering (Chambré, 1993; Fischer, Mueller, & Cooper, 1991; Herzog & Morgan, 1993; Marriott’s Seniors Volunteerism Study, 1991; McNamara & Gonzales, 2009; Musick et al., 1999; Musick et al., 2000; Tang, 2006; Tang, 2009; Wilson & Musick, 1997).

One prior study identified was the Marriott Senior Study (1991), commissioned by Marriott Senior Living Services, and the United States Administration on Aging. The primary interest in the Marriott Senior study was to provide valuable insight into the current level of volunteerism among seniors, as well as their primary areas of interest and what motivates them to donate their services. Telephone interviews were with 968 seniors. Most participants were retired, and 89% were white, and had an average income of $22,700. The report identified higher education levels as co-related to volunteering among older adults. “Sixty-six percent of respondents with college degrees volunteered, while only 37.5% of those with high school education provided services to others” (Sneed, 1991, p. 1).

A limitation of the Marriott Seniors questionnaire is that it did not allow respondents to talk about their experiences in volunteering. The list of ten questions had restricted responses. It would have been helpful to have open-ended questions to allow for group dialogue. Implications for my study of senior African American volunteers will give participants the opportunity to share their own personal volunteer stories. This
insight will provide a deeper perspective on formal volunteering. Fischer, Mueller, and Cooper (1991) also conducted a Minnesota Seniors Study of the needs and resources of elderly people in 1988 through 1989. In this study, 1,500 non-institutionalized Minnesotans, age 60 and older, were surveyed by telephone. To select participants, probability sampling techniques with stratification by region was used. In their study, Fischer, Mueller, and Cooper (1991) found that education was also related to the amount of time given to volunteering: “College educated volunteers tend to contribute more hours per month than less educated volunteers” (p. 190). Among the elderly, income also affected the amount of volunteering; the higher the income, the greater . . . vice versa. Changing demographics predict that more recent cohorts of elderly are more educated and have higher incomes. The study noted that these “elderly people who have access to resources such as income and education may have more discretionary use of their time” (Fischer et al., 1991, p. 190). A major limitation mentioned was the lack of standardized definitions and methodology, which made coding and analyzing data on older adults difficult.

Further, the authors did not provide their results disaggregated by race and ethnicity. The researchers failed to describe if education for African Americans equated to more time volunteering. What is not known are the experiences of those African American who have resources, such as human capital.

In their research, Wilson and Musick (1997) used two-wave data from a panel survey titled “Americans’ Changing Lives,” to identify what resources are needed and how they are related to volunteering. The data used a multistage, stratified area probability sample of persons 25 years of age or older that lived in the contiguous United
States (House, 1995). African Americans and persons over age 60 were over sampled. A total of 3,617 respondents were interviewed for the first wave in 1986, while 2,867 respondents were available in the second wave during 1989. The researchers’ findings showed that productive work in formal volunteering requires human capital. The term “productive work” was once limited to paid labor. Recently, “productive work” has been amended to include household chores, child care, and care for elderly kin, and covers a myriad of unpaid formal and informal volunteering (Herzog & Morgan, 1993).

Wilson and Musick (1997) proposed an integrated theory of volunteer work, one that differentiated formal volunteering (the focus of the present study) and informal helping (e.g., running errands for an elderly neighbor). According to Wilson and Musick (1997), their Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work is a function of three forms of capital: human (education, family income, and health), social (interaction, and children), and cultural (public and private religious practices). Education has been found to be the most significant predictor of the involvement of seniors in volunteer work (Fisher & Shaffer, 1993). As education increased, so did volunteering activity because the more education individuals obtain, the more aware they are of social problems (Wilson, 2000). Furthermore, individuals with higher levels of education were likely to possess a wider range of skills which organizations may find desirable, such as the ability to run a meeting.

**Human capital.** The authors began their analysis of the influence of human capital on volunteering. Human capital has been the most consistent predictor of volunteering because “it is required for successful performance of many jobs” (Wilson &
To measure human capital, the variables of education, family income, and functional health are used.

**Education.** Education is a capital to the extent that volunteering provides “the opportunity to exercise and practice knowledge and skills that otherwise could not be used” (Clary & Snyder, 1991, p. 126). Human capital was measured by the number of years of education completed, ranging from 0 to 17 years (Wilson & Musick, 1997, p. 702). As Americans became more educated, they increased the opportunity to participate in a wider range of volunteer activities. A survey conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2003) revealed “only 22 percent of Americans with just a high school diploma were volunteers, compared to 34 percent of those with some college experience and 46 percent of college graduates” (p. 2). Closely related to education is income.

**Income.** There is a cost associated with volunteering; income is the cost of unpaid productive work, meaning that it is costly to perform. Although volunteering is free labor, it is often expected that members pay dues or incur other incidental expenses. Income is measured by family income, which was selected rather than personal income, to assess the impact of earnings on volunteer work because in that family income is a better indicator of social status (Wilson & Musick, 1997, p. 699). Wilson (2000) found that income was positively related to volunteering. “Wealthy individuals ($75,000) are three times more likely to be asked to volunteer than are poor individuals (< $10,000). It was noted that a higher income or greater personal wealth can contribute to more volunteer activity because individuals with increased financial resources may have the greater ability to volunteer as potential barriers decrease, such as transportation, or the need to spend more time in paid employment (Wilson, 2000, p. 128).
Health. Depending on one’s health status, volunteer work can be a resource or a constraint (Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993, p. 1450). Among the elderly, health status can affect their physical capabilities to do volunteer work or to assist those in need of help. In this case, volunteering becomes a constraint. Functional health was measured using the “six items index indicating various types of functional impairments. Index values range from 1 to 4, where 1 indicated the most severe functional impairment and 4 indicates no functional impairment. Chronic illness measured the number of chronic conditions (0 to 10) the respondent experienced during the previous year. Possible conditions included: arthritis or rheumatism, lung disease, hypertension, heart trouble, diabetes, cancer, foot problems, stroke, broken bones, and incontinence” (Wilson & Musick, 1997, p. 703). When volunteering was a resource, research showed that it can improve a volunteer’s health status, especially among older adults. The researchers found that volunteers age 65 years and older were less likely to die than non-volunteers, but only if they limited their volunteer work to one organization; “those who volunteered for more than one had a greater chance of dying” (Wilson & Musick, 2007, p. 511).

Several writers (Fischer et al., 1991; Caro & Bass, 1997) reported that good health among older people increased the chances of volunteering. Generally, those volunteers who were more than 70 or 80 years were in good physical health (Knauf, 1992). Chambre (1993) and Fischer and Schaffer (1993) stated that poor health plus mortality among those more than 75 years old resulted in the termination of their volunteer efforts. Gallagher (1994) found poor health and lack of time to be the most common reasons for not volunteering. Despite this limitation, Fischer et al., (1991) discovered that approximately 40% of older adults who reported more than one functional problem
continued to participate in their volunteer activities. In a later study, Fischer and Schaffer (1993) found, over a period of time, improvement in the health status of older adults.

**Social capital.** Wilson and Musick’s (1997) second dimension of Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work is social capital, which is supported by the idea that “individuals and groups can gain resources from their connections to one another and from the type of these connections” (p. 698). A social capital perspective argued that extensive social connections can increase volunteering opportunities (Oesterle, Johnston, & Mortimer, 2004; Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1997). People joined organizations through their friendships with others, and many of their friendships were formed in organizations. Social networks provided information, pooled labor, and trust as channels to volunteering (Smith, 1994; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Family, a central institution that promotes social integration, drew adults into volunteering via connections with schools and communities (Oesterle et al., 2004). In terms of the older adults, elders relied on both formal and informal social capital networks after retirement or entering an “empty nest” period (Herzog & Morgan, 1993). The more people an individual knows the greater the likelihood of being “asked” to volunteer. Social networks and trust foster volunteering in a number of ways, which helped to explain “why high socioeconomic status people join more organizations and are more likely to be active in them” (Wilson & Musick, 1997, p. 223). Three dimensions to social capital are (a) informal social networks, (b) formal social networks, and (c) church attendance.

**Informal networks.** The first network is informal and includes “friendships and regular contacts with neighbors and kin residing outside the household” (Wilson & Musick, 2007, p. 267).
**Formal networks.** The second network is formal; those formal social networks are membership in organizations, such as clubs, voluntary organizations, political parties, and religious organizations. According to Musick and Wilson (2007), “The more education people have the more extensive and heterogeneous are their social network which increases the likelihood of being asked” (p. 120).

**Church networks.** The third is church attendance, “The frequency of church attendance predicts volunteer participation” (Musick & Wilson 2007, p. 567). People with higher levels of religiosity are more likely to be encouraged to volunteer.

**Measurements of social capital.** Musick and Wilson (2007) used four measurements of social capital: (a) how many people the respondent knew, (b) how many of these people knew each other, (c) frequency of contacts, either by telephone or visiting, and (d) frequency of church attendance at meetings and services. In their study, researchers found that although women have fewer volunteer association memberships, women are more likely to be asked to volunteer because they attend church more frequently. Therefore, a social network “influences how many different volunteer activities people engage in” (Musick & Wilson, 2007, p. 277).

**Cultural capital.** Wilson and Musick’s (1997) third dimension of Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work is cultural capital. Cultural capital is “a sense of social responsibility or moral obligation toward those who are less fortunate and the motivation to contribute to the greater good” (p. 367). A wide range of psychological research showed that cultural values and personal traits motivate volunteering. Musick, Wilson, and Bynum (2000) reported that religious attendance positively affected whites and African Americans, although the effect was stronger for African Americans. The strength
of religious beliefs, a one-item measure asking about the importance of religious and spiritual beliefs to everyday life, was reported to have a negative effect on African Americans and a positive effect on whites (Wilson, Musick, & Bynum 2000, p. 1555).

The study found that volunteering was positively related to human, social, and cultural capital. Further conclusions that tested the Integrated Theory of Volunteer work suggested that people with high socioeconomic status volunteered more because they had more verbal, writing, and social skills, which gave them more confidence to reach out to others and made them more desirable as volunteers (Verba et al., 1995).

The results suggested that some African Americans were less likely to formally volunteer than whites because they had less human capital. However, implications for the dissertation study suggested that there are senior African Americans who possessed a great wealth of human capital. Whether these volunteers who apparently have such quantities of human capital have been able to contribute their skills and knowledge is unclear and warrants investigation.

To increase our understanding of older adults’ volunteerism in the general population, the next study discussed focused on education. Chambre (1993) reviewed surveys that focused on older adult volunteers from 1965 to 1990 and suggested that the percentage of seniors who volunteered had increased with time, citing 11% in 1965 and 40% in the early 1990s. Several surveys were analyzed to capture the difference in the data on volunteerism past trends and future prospects. First, the National Surveys in 1965 were used to monitor volunteering patterns. Second, the Action Surveys of 1975 were used to study time, year and seasonal differences. Third, Independent Sector Surveys

One of the results reported that, relative to earlier cohorts of retirees, the then-current 65 and older population was better educated (Chambre, 1993; Morris & Caro, 1996). The gap between educational achievement among the young and old had virtually disappeared. Between the 1950s and 1980s, the number of years of schooling increased from an average of eight years to 12 years for all age groups (Chambre, 1993; Morris & Caro, 1996). The overall supply of older volunteers is likely to increase because there will be an increase in older persons whose education level will continue to rise. By 1990, one in 10 of older persons were college graduates as compared with 16% of those 55 to 64 years old and 22% of those 45 to 54 (U. S. Department of Commerce, 1990).

Specific to the issue of senior African American volunteers, Chambers’ study did not consider that as the aging population grows, it will also become more and more diverse. In terms of race, “A Portrait of Older Minorities,” (AARP, 1995) reported that by the year 2025 nationally, 25% of the elderly population are projected to be nonwhite. Perhaps there are different pathways to formal volunteering for minority groups, particularly among senior African American volunteers. Historically, the volunteer workforce has been dominated by whites. Participation in formal volunteering is mainly described as a white and middle class pursuit, which creates exclusiveness. While not all formal volunteers conform to the dominant status or middle-class, middle-aged and white stereotype, as Gaskin and Smith (1997) note, “We cannot escape the conclusion that there is a bias in formal volunteering towards the higher socio-economic groups” (p. 111). Additionally, research reports that African Americans are less frequently asked to
participate (Ferree, Barry, & Manno, 1998; Hodgkinson, 1995). Again, using the Americans’ Changing Lives survey, Musick, Wilson, and Bynum (2000) asked questions pertaining to race differences in volunteering. They examined whether and how volunteering by African Americans differs from volunteering by whites. Americans’ Changing Lives survey data on volunteering used a multistage, stratified area probability sample of persons 25 years of age or older living in the contiguous United States (House, 1995). African Americans and persons older than 60 years old were oversampled. A total of 3,617 respondents were interviewed for the first wave in 1986, and 2,867 respondents were available in the second wave during 1989. The response rate in the first wave was 67%. A series of tobit regression equations were used to measure resource theory of volunteering, human, social and cultural capital (Muick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000).

Among their findings and conclusions, the authors confirmed that white Americans do volunteer more than African Americans. Some of the differences were due to educational and income inequalities between the two populations. Among White Americans, education and income increased participation in volunteering. Among African Americans, there were “no socioeconomic differences in volunteering” (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000, p. 1558). Indeed, both poor and rich African Americans were equally likely to volunteer. Another finding was that higher-status people are thought to be more competent in many settings and get better access to more powerful roles (Ridgeway, 1995). This is one reason that people with educational credentials and other forms of human capital are highly targeted by volunteer recruiters. They are judged to be more competent, even for jobs for which they have no training. However, this practice breaks down in the case of minority groups (e.g., gender and race), whose members have
to "prove themselves" in each setting in which they participate (Musick et al., 2000, p. 1565).

One of the limitations of the study was that it did not extend to those whose volunteering was entirely secular, nonreligious. More research is needed on racial differences in the goals of volunteer work and how they might create different pathways into the volunteer labor force. For example, a recent analysis of data from five cities in the U.S. showed that African Americans were more likely than whites to participate in neighborhood associations and crime-watch organizations, but that whites were more likely than African Americans to participate in issue-based citizen groups and social, service, or self-help organizations (Portney & Berry, 1997). Each kind of volunteering demands a different kind of resource; education is more useful for issue-based organizations than for crime-watch organizations. Whites, who are typically better educated, might “qualify” more readily for the former than for the latter.

A recommendation for future research by Musick, Wilson, and Bynum (2000) noted larger sample sizes are needed to explore racial differences in how and where volunteer efforts are distributed. In this study, the dependent variable did not distinguish between soup kitchens and save-the-whales campaigns. Not only are there likely to be racial differences in the substance of volunteer work, but it is also possible that class differences determined the direction of volunteer efforts differently in the two populations. Another recommendation called for the need to use longitudinal rather than cross-sectional data in order to make causal attributions with greater confidence. It is unlikely that volunteering “causes” differences in income, education, or functional health, but the causal ordering between social resources and volunteering is far less certain.
Using the same survey data, Tang (2008, 2006) examined what resources (human, social, and cultural capital) are needed for volunteerism across age cohorts. The findings indicated that more highly educated older adults are more likely than their less-educated counterparts to volunteer in all five types of organizations (religious, educational, political, senior citizens, and others). The highly educated were also more likely to volunteer in a wider range of organizations and devote more hours. Limitations identified in this study included concerns that (a) differences in organization types may not be a valid measure due to the lack of information regarding the nature of volunteer work, areas of activities, or volunteer role requirements in the five types of organizations. “Socioeconomic disparities cannot be fully examined because little information is provided regarding the organization policy in recruiting and facilitating older adults; and (b) education and income may not be sufficient indicators of socioeconomic status to test its relationship with voluntary organization involvement. Social class is a very complex concept including such measures as income, profession, education, employment status, home ownership, and residence location, not to mention social indicators such as race” (Tang, 2008, p. 70). The author concluded that innovative recruitment programs are needed to tap ethnic volunteers among elders from all socioeconomic groups.

The limitations of the Tang (2008) study confirmed the need for future research to address concerns related to the lack of information on the type of volunteer organizations, activities, volunteer roles, recruitment and self-perception of formal volunteering. Further, there is a need for a qualitative study, especially of senior African Americans, to assist in addressing the need for recruitment of older adults from all education and socioeconomic groups.
An alternative view offered by Carr (2009) examined the characteristics associated with how much older people, or “third agers,” volunteer during later life in the United States. The term “third age” is a period in one's life that occurs after retirement but prior to the onset of disability. Third agers are people who are 64 or older who engage in active leisure activities such as physical exercise and voluntary work. Data for the investigation was drawn from a supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) for September 2007. The sample size was 39,609 respondents 50 years or older. Logistic regression models were used for data analysis. The third age characteristics associated with volunteer behavior were having adequate economic, human, health, social, and temporal capital. To address economic capital, a family income range of $24,000 to $49,000 was used. Human capital measured the level of education using five categories: less than high school, high school diploma, some college, Bachelor’s Degree, and Post-Bachelor’s education. The three categories comprised (health, social and temporal capital, and employment status is coded as five components); employed more than 20 hours per week, employed 20 hours or less per week, employed hours vary, not employed, and disabled and unable to work. The results from the logistic regression models indicated that third age characteristics (including having adequate economic, human, health, and temporal capital) were associated with volunteer behavior and that having access to a social network also increased the likeliness of volunteering (Current Population Survey, 2007)

With regard to other demographic characteristics, Carr’s (2009) model which focused on the likeliness of volunteering in later life showed that African Americans have 28.5% lower odds of volunteering, Hispanics have 32.5% lower odds, and people of
another race have 28.6% lower odds of volunteering than whites. Those born in another
country have much lower odds of 52.5%, and females have 40% higher odds of
volunteering than men. These characteristics suggested that possession and access to
human, social and cultural resources is important to having the ability to “choose” to
engage in voluntary activities. In closing, the researcher Carr, (2009) suggested that all
third agers are uniquely positioned to volunteer. The limitation of the study was that third
agers were “described as if the potential for volunteering is universally accessible in the
United States for those born between particular chronological age boundaries (Carr,
2009, p. 168). However, what was not articulated in this study are the stories of senior
African American volunteers that possess adequate economic, (human, health, and
cultural resources). A qualitative research approach would explore those who have
resources: human, social, and cultural capital to see what types of organizations that
senior African American volunteers can access and participate in as volunteers.

Beyond Carr (2009), there were several gaps in the volunteer literature. The gaps
are presented in the following order.

2. Those related to social capital and volunteering.
3. Those related to cultural capital and volunteering.

**Human capital volunteering summary.** There are currently several gaps in the
study of human capital and volunteering. One in particular was the need for greater
inclusion (including access and participation) of ethnically and racially diverse older
populations. As far as formal volunteering goes, some people were more likely to
volunteer than others. Wilson and Musick’s (1997) The Integrated theory of Volunteer
Work has been used to give a better understanding of the types of people who are typically recruited. The traditional profile has been white, highly educated, highly paid, with good functional health, altruistically motivated, and religiously affiliated. At the heart of this study’s concern were older adults, African Americans, and minority ethnic groups who were low-income, less educated, and might have had functional health (disability) concerns which excluded them from formal volunteering.

Wilson, Musick, and Bynum (2000) suggested that racial differences in volunteering stemmed from disadvantages in educational achievement and disparities in employment. Tang (2008) noted that racial differences in volunteering was more evident in the older generation of African Americans because of discrimination and segregation, which restricted access to certain types of voluntary organizations among this elderly group. Research suggested that African Americans have had to develop systems and institutions meant to alleviate their depressed condition due to their low socio-economic status and exclusion from white organizations. Wilson, Musick, and Bynum (2000) suggested, “African Americans are more likely to develop civic skills in their church at each educational level” (p. 1545). Scholars Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) looked at race differences in the acquisition of civic skills, such as the ability to run a meeting. They found that African Americans acquired more civic skills from their church participation, while whites acquired more from their participation in secular organizations.

We know from the literature review that resources are needed to volunteer and depending upon the type of volunteer work resource requirements can restrict opportunities for those who have had less education and income. What we do not know is
the experiences of senior African Americans who have apparently gained the capital needed to access and participate in formal volunteering.

**Social Capital and Volunteering**

As discussed in Chapter 1, the second dimension of formal volunteering is social capital. Wilson and Musick (1997) asserted that social capital means that “individuals and groups can gain resources from their connections to one another and from the types of these connections” (p. 698). A social capital perspective argued that extensive social connections can increase volunteering opportunities (Oesterle, Johnston & Mortimer, 2004; Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Social networks and trust foster volunteering in a number of ways.

Earlier research demonstrated that higher-status and "better connected" people were more likely to be asked to volunteer (Hodgkinson, 1995). Again, using the Americans’ Changing Lives survey, Wilson, Musick, and Bynum (2000) examined the impact of race and formal volunteering. Social resources were defined in the survey as social integration, meeting attendance, and service attendance. To measure social capital a six-item response scale from (1) never, to (6) more than once a day were used. The response categories were (1) never, (2) less than once a month, (3) about once a month, (4) two or three times a month, (5) once a week, (6) more than once a week.

The study confirmed that social capital encourages volunteering because it increases the chance of being “asked.” Those who maintained a wide network of informal and formal social connections were aware and considered for volunteer opportunities. According to Musick, and Wilson (2008), “African Americans looking to climb socially must turn to the church for social status” (p. 213). The authors found that African
Americans tend to be better endowed with social capital, which makes up for their lack of personal resources. However, “African Americans volunteer at rates lower than whites because they are less frequently asked, at every level of resource” (Musick et al., 2000, p. 1551). Surprisingly, they found that the reason African Americans were least likely to be asked to volunteer is due to their lower socioeconomic status.

Further research is needed on racial differences in volunteering so that differentiation of what kind of volunteer work people do can be established. Specific to senior African Americans, Musick and Wilson (2008) and Musick, Wilson, and Bynum (2000) found that socio-economic status was what made the difference in who gets recruited to volunteer. Implications for this study explored how senior African Americans were recruited, the types of organizations where they volunteered, and how often they received invitations to join other formal volunteering organizations.

Okun and Michel (2006) tested the hypothesis that sense of community is an independent predictor of volunteering among the older adults. McMillan and Chavis, (1986) defined a sense of community (SOC) as a “feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). This study used secondary analysis data from the U.S. Survey of Midlife Development that included respondents 60 to 74 years old (N = 653). There was an oversampling of older middle-aged respondents and men. Telephone interviews had a response rate of 70% and two self-administered questionnaires received a response rate of 86.8%. Four items were used to measure sense of community: (1) “I feel close to other people in my community;” (2) “my community is a source of comfort”, (3) “I don’t feel I belong to
anything I’d call community”, and (4) “My daily activities don’t create anything worthwhile for my community”. The items were rated on a 7-point scale (1= strongly Agree to 7–disagree strongly).

In Okun and Michel’s study (2006), social capital was assessed by using four measurements. Two of the four were related to family. Respondents were asked whether they were married, divorced, separated, or widowed or never married. The third measurement, “contact with friends” was assessed on an 8-point scale (1=several times a day, 8= never or hardly ever). The final measurement, organizational ties was assessed by asking respondents to indicate the number of meetings that they had per month involving (a) unions other than professional groups, (b) sports or social groups, and (c) other not job-related groups” (Okun and Michel, 2006, p. 178).

After controlling for demographic factors and human, social, and cultural capital variables, a logistic regression model indicated that as one’s sense of community increases, the likelihood of one’s volunteering would rise. Among the control variables, working 40 or more hours per week (relative to not working) and being divorced, separated, or widowed (relative to being married) were associated with lower rates of volunteering. The likelihood of volunteering increased as education, organizational ties, church attendance, and generative concern increased. There were three limitations of the study. First, models with large sets of control variables are at risk for an inflated study wise Type 1 error rate. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the data did not permit the direction of causality between sense of community and volunteering (Wilson, 2000). Third, a sense of community was treated as a unidimensional construct, whereas other investigators have assessed sense of community as a multi-dimensional construct (Obst &
White, 2004). The researchers recommended that efforts to retain young-old adult volunteers should emphasize how the organization’s activities reflect humanitarian values, provide opportunities to show a concern for the community, and benefit community members.

Implications for future research supported the fact that retention of older volunteers depended, in part, on whether they viewed their volunteer role as meaningful. Based on these findings, older adults were likely to perceive their volunteer roles as meaningful if the activities reflected humanitarian values, provided opportunities to demonstrate a concern for the welfare of the community, and benefited the members of the community. The implication for the dissertation study of senior African American volunteers was to examine if the types of volunteer organizations selected are based on humanitarian values, community concerns, or other benefits that have not been mentioned.

The next study discussed addressed age cohort differences in human, social, and cultural capital resources needed for volunteering. Tang (2006) used a secondary data analysis of three waves of data from the Americans’ Changing Lives surveys. Social capital was measured by informal social integration and number of friends. The author examined if there were any age cohort differences in human, social, and cultural capital related to volunteering. To measure social capital three variables, social support, number of friends, and informal social integration, were used. The social integration is a technical term referring to the number of interpersonal ties that a person has. (for example, number of members in personal networks, organizational memberships). The study confirmed that older cohorts relied more on human capital and social integration to expand
volunteer hours and organizational involvement, whereas younger people needed more spiritual and social supports to increase volunteer commitment.

Based on these findings, do social networks of senior African American volunteers encourage both religious and secular volunteering? This question might offer insight to those social ties that encourage secular, formal volunteering participation. This information can help voluntary organizations develop effective strategies to recruit potential volunteers in the future.

A recent study by Tang (2009) that revisited the Americans’ Changing Lives survey suggested resource inadequacy in the areas of human, social, and cultural capital may explain the relatively lower rates of volunteering for secular versus religious organizations in the population older than age 55. One part of the study investigated if social capital makes a difference in the type and scope of organizations for which older adults (age 60 and older) volunteered. The author found that African American elderly reported higher levels of participation in neighborhood organizations such as churches, school groups, and adult leadership of youth groups than was reported for volunteering in job-related and social-service organizations by Miner and Tolnay, 1998. Historically, access to structured positions in certain types of voluntary organizations was more available to white volunteers, especially in job-related and social service organizations in which whites were the dominant group (Miner & Tolnay, 1998). Two variables were used to measure social capital: (a) informal social contact, and (b) formal social contact. The results of social capital revealed that informal social network enhanced the level of organizational involvement, especially in the old-old age 70 or older. Older people relied
more on informal social ties to engage in organizational volunteering than younger and middle-aged cohorts.

The implication for the dissertation study of senior African Americans is a need for articulation of their experiences in volunteer roles. Furthermore, the research explored what kinds of referrals were given for volunteer work from their social connections. This question sought to find if their social networks extended beyond their own ethnicity. A group question was asked to see if they received a solicitation for any other volunteer organizations. Additionally, this study determined if their affiliations, both informal and formal, increased the number of solicitations received from voluntary organizations.

The study by McNamara and Gonzales (2011) addressed our understanding of the volunteer transitions by examining the individual and social circumstances of older adults’ lives. Longitudinal data from a representative sample of the U.S. population drew on a subsample of respondents from the 2000-2008 Health and Retirement Study and the 2001-2009 Consumption and Activity Mail Survey. A total of 4,526 respondents populations aged 50-80 were included in the random effects pooled time series analysis. The majority of the participants 87.1% were white, and 63 was the average age. The samples included 87.1% white females, and 7.1% African American participants. Social linkages of older adults were measured based on the number of children in the household and informal social interaction. Older adults’ lives are linked to members of the family, coworkers, and members of the community. These linked lives, and the responsibilities and obligations that come with them, can affect volunteer transitions (engagement in volunteer activity, intensity, and cessation). The authors found that social capital was
both positively and negatively associated with the volunteer process because it depends on the quantity and quality of the social linkages.

A limitation of the study was the lack of a large sample of ethnic minority groups. Recommendations for research suggested that civic engagement may need to be a broader umbrella to understand the range of activities that include formal and informal help given to neighbors, friends, and relatives (Kaskie, Imhof, Cavanaugh, & Culp, 2008).

Specific to the dissertation study of senior African American volunteers, the literature could benefit in a broader understanding of the unique relationships that are established within this ethnic group. Previous research suggested that African Americans are resource-rich with social capital. Therefore, the dissertation research provided examples of how social networks are cultivated. Additionally, the quantity of social linkages were explored to see if active senior African Americans are encouraged to participate in particular organizations and if it affected their ability to remain fully engaged in volunteering.

**Social capital summary.** There were several gaps related to social capital and volunteering. A gap worth mentioning was the factors that affect volunteer engagement (starting), intensity (number of hours) and cessation (stopping). Research asserted social mechanisms (friends, relatives and organizational ties) that link social resources to volunteering increased the chances of “being asked” to volunteer. “For an individual to be ‘productive’ in society his or her skills must be socially valued and that individual must also have the capability and opportunity to be involved, all of which are strongly shaped by race” (Wilson & Musick, 1997). African Americans looking to climb socially must turn to the church for social status (Moore 1991). Okun and Michel (2006) studied
one’s sense of community and found that older adults are likely to perceive their volunteer roles as meaningful if the activities reflect humanitarian values, provide opportunities to demonstrate a concern for the welfare of the community, and benefit the members of the community.

Specific to senior African Americans, community attachment has a strong likelihood of volunteering because either (a) “they form and participate in African American organizations as overcompensation or reaction to perceived exclusion by white organizations, or (b) individuals of a specific ethnic community develop consciousness of and cohesiveness with one another when pressured by a different, usually more powerful group of people” (Hall-Russell & Kasberg 1997, p. 8-11). According to Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011), among the major racial and ethnic groups who participated in secular volunteering, whites continue to volunteer at a higher rate (28.2%) than do African Americans (20.3%), Asians (20.0%), or Hispanics (14.9). Wilson and Musick (1997) affirmed that “most probably, high socioeconomic status people volunteer more because they have more verbal, writing, and social skills, which gives them more confidence to reach out to others and makes them more desirable as volunteers” (p. 710).

In all studies, African Americans were less likely to be asked to volunteer than whites, despite having more social resources (Hodgkinson, 1995). African Americans who were not currently volunteering were more likely than whites who were not currently volunteering to say the reason is that nobody asked them (Ferree, Barry, & Manno, 1998). If social networks do indeed supply more opportunities, such as paid and unpaid work, then why are African Americans not being asked to volunteer, or are being recruited by voluntary organizations? African Americans tended to participate in
organizations involved in solving problems in their communities, including crime prevention (Freedman, 1998), social services, political activities (Wilson, 2000), civil rights, and fraternal organizations (Carson, 1993). Research suggested recruiters, like fund-raisers, tended to approach those who have previously volunteered and have superior personal resources and this system of exclusion perpetuates itself (Wilson, Musick & Bynum, 2000). Furthermore, it could be hypothesized, faith-based organizations and community groups are more inclusive for those who have lessor resources because they provide greater chances to socialize with others, get support, and enhance their social networks. This might explain why African Americans are more likely to volunteer for religious organizations. This finding suggested further examination of the social networks of senior African American volunteers. This might offer insight to the nature of volunteer work for African Americans and those social ties that distinguish between solicitation by religious and secular organizations.

**Cultural Capital and Volunteering**

As discussed in Chapter 1, a third dimension of volunteerism is cultural capital. Wilson and Musick (1997) described cultural capital as a sense of social responsibility or moral obligation toward those who are less fortunate and the motivation to contribute to the greater good. A wide range of psychological research showed values and personality traits that motivate volunteering; commonly cited motivations included a religious orientation, pro-social role identity, generativity, referring to outliving oneself and taking care of others more than concern for oneself as the result of taking a series of social roles: spouse, parent, grandparent, employee, friend, mentor, advisor, and consultant (Fischer,
Day, & Collier, 1998), a need to give back to the community, and dispositional empathy which is a sense of moral obligation to care about others.

Turning to cultural resources, there was considerable support in the scholarly literature on African American history for the idea that, as an oppressed minority community, African Americans have been forced to rely heavily on each other for help and have cultivated an ethic of mutual concern and care (Carson, 1989). In their study, Musick, Wilson and Bynum (2000) looked at differences in whether and how volunteering by African Americans differs from volunteering by whites. To measure cultural capital, two questions were asked for religiosity. First was “how important are religious and spiritual beliefs in your day-to-day life?” Responses ranged from important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important. “Second, was “life is not worth living if one cannot contribute to the well-being of other people. “Responses ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree” (p. 1549).

The findings revealed that church attendance was found to have a more powerful effect on African Americans volunteering than on whites volunteering. Most volunteering for African Americans was influenced by their religious beliefs and practices in the African American community. “African American churches, on the whole, are more socially active in their communities than white churches and ... they also tend to participate in a greater range of community programs” (Lincoln & Mamiya 1990, p. 187). The African American church is a platform for political and social activism and a gateway to “informal and formal social opportunities, including ties to voluntary association” (Ellison & Sherkat 1995, p. 1417). African Americans were not only more likely than whites to be church members, but they were also more likely than whites to
develop “civic skills in their church at each educational level, African Americans are the most likely to exercise politically relevant skills in church: (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady 1993, p. 483). Given the salience of church life in the African American community, a high level of participation in the congregation was likely to be a stronger predictor of volunteer work than the same level of participation among white organizations.

There were two types of volunteering: religious and secular volunteering. Most religious volunteers also volunteered in secular organizations. Musick and Wilson (2008) defined volunteering as “any unpaid work in an organization” (p. 215). Previous studies showed that religious persons were more likely to volunteer than the non-religious and that increasing levels of religious attendance are positively related with volunteering (Janoski & Wilson 1995). Although, volunteering is both informal and formal, there were distinctions between secular and religious volunteering. Some volunteering concerned exclusively aiding religious institutions such as in a church, mosque or temple. Secular volunteering concerned volunteering for all other kinds of organizations, such as health or educational institutions. The dissertation study focused exclusively on formal volunteering and senior African American volunteers. Formal volunteering was selected for the following reasons. First, as past research shows, informal volunteering tended to be more spontaneous and was more dependent on individual need for helping, such as caring for a loved one (Amato, 1990). In contrast, formal or planned volunteering was more structured and thus less responsive to explanations based on personal situational factors. Second, organizations were more likely to encourage formal rather than informal volunteering in their workers. Third, there appeared to be little research on senior African
Americans who possibly had the capital or resources that could make substantive volunteering.

One of the limitations of the study was that it did not extend to those whose volunteers who were not entirely for secular, nonreligious organizations. Also worth noting was the remark about the African American church being a gateway to “informal and formal social opportunities, including ties to voluntary associations” (Ellison & Sherkat 1995, p. 1417). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) confirmed that religious organizations were a major avenue to formal volunteering. It reported 47% of all volunteers age 65 years and older participated in religious organizations. In one survey, African Americans were more likely than whites to say their church influenced their decision to volunteer (Ferree et al., 1998, p. 76). In fact, if this is true, then why are volunteer rates lower for African Americans than for whites? And what explains why some senior African Americans give for participating in secular versus religious volunteering?

Cultural capital summary. There were several gaps in the volunteer literature that are related to cultural capital and volunteering. A noteworthy gap identified in the empirical literature was that older people are a growing, yet underutilized resource for responding to community needs (Freedman, 2001). Based on the findings, in the literature the term “underutilized” varies by race, the type of volunteer work, and the capital resources needed. Research found that older volunteers were most likely to serve in churches and religious-related organizations (Caro & Bass, 1995; Fisher, Mueller, & Cooper, 1991; Herzog, Kahn, Morgen, Jackson, & Antonucci, 1989; Van Willigen, 2000). Also, community agencies were among older volunteers’ choices (Caro & Bass,
1995; Herzog et al., 1989; Van Willigen, 2000). Surprisingly, race differences in the explanation of volunteering did not receive much attention. A current study by Musick et al., (2000) discovered that African Americans were more influenced by their church than are whites. The authors found that church attendance helped to explain some of the race differences in volunteering. People who attended church frequently were more likely to volunteer, and African Americans attended church more frequently than whites (p. 207). On the whole, African Americans’ churches have been more socially active in their communities, and this has provided a platform for political and social activism, as well as a gateway to “informal and formal social opportunities, including ties to voluntary associations” (Ellison & Sherkat, 1995, p. 1417). Historically, exclusion from mainstream voluntary organizations compelled African Americans to create various groups and associations to provide support with concerns of the African American community. This would perhaps explain why African Americans volunteer more for religious organizations and neighborhood associations; however, it did not tell us about those senior African Americans in secular, formal volunteering.

Although, not specified by race, Tang (2008) asserted that “religious organizations and senior center groups may be more open and accessible to older adults of all backgrounds with fewer volunteering requirements in terms of eligibility criteria, skill and knowledge, or time commitment” (p. 70). Similarly, Caro and Bass (1997) noted that “religiosity is thought to shape volunteering because most religious organizations regard assistance to others as a valued activity and also because religious organizations provide convenient vehicles for engaging in such volunteer activity” (p. 1273). Thus, this may explain why secular, formal volunteering is viewed as exclusive. Based on these
findings, implications for the dissertation study of senior African American volunteers might shed light on how secular, formal volunteer organizations in which they participate were able to create access and participation. Next are mixed studies of human, social, and cultural capital.

**Mixed Studies of Human, Social and Cultural Capital and Volunteering**

How older adults access volunteer roles is addressing a study by Tang and Morrow-Howell (2008) that examined how socio-structural factors such as education, income, age, gender and race are associated with access.

Secondary data was collected from 2002 Current Population Survey, which included aged 65 and older (N = 18, 109) non volunteers and (n = 3,939) volunteers. The education level used a measurement of 1 to 16 years. The income variable ranged from $5,000 to $75,000. The age of the participants ranged from 65 to 80 years old. To identify gender, “man” or “woman” was used. The majority of the sample size consisted of white (94%) or African American (6%). Bivariate analysis was performed to examine if differences exist in accessing volunteer roles across various types of organizations. The first question was “How did you first become a volunteer?” The respondents were provided with several categories: (a) approaching the organization; (b) being asked; (c) family member’s, friend’s, or coworker’s involvement in the organization; (d) one’s own involvement in the organization, being referred by a volunteer organization, or responding to public appeal in a newspaper, the radio, or on the Internet; and (e) others, including court-ordered community service. The second question, “Who asked you to become a volunteer for this organization?” listed the following categories: (a) friend or relative, (b) someone in the organization, and (c) others, including coworker, boss–
employer, or someone else. Regarding what type of organization older adults volunteered, the categories were (a) religious; (b) civic, political, professional, or international; (c) educational or youth service; (d) hospital or other health-related; (e) social or community service, environmental or animal care, public safety; and (f) sports, hobby, cultural or arts and other types of organizations.

The result from multinomial logistic regressions reported that education, income, age, gender and race were associated with the ways that older adults access volunteer roles. It was confirmed that respondents categorized as young-old (under age 75), white, female, married and having a higher level of education and family income are most likely to have access to volunteer activities. Three types of organizations in which older adults were likely to volunteer were: 45% religious, 21% social and community service groups; and 11% hospitals or other health-related organizations. Sixty-three percent were asked by someone in the organization to volunteer, and 31% were asked by their friends and relatives. Organizations that recruited older adults directly were identified as religious (75%), social service (48%), and hospitals or health-related (52%).

The limitation of this study was restricted by the use of the Current Population Survey (2002), which did not address access to volunteer roles. The authors recommended that future studies need to ask respondents about their access and participation to certain volunteer roles. Another recommendation suggested exploring what kind of barriers and what kind of organizational support is needed to help older adults gain access to volunteer roles. The last recommendation was to ask different types of voluntary organizations about their recruitment methods for older adults.
Based on these findings, social service and hospital or health-related organizations typically approach older adults to volunteer. This dissertation study of senior African American volunteers explored what types of secular, formal organizations are most likely to recruit African Americans and what types of volunteer roles or activities are available to them.

To broaden our understanding about ethnic and cultural diversity among Americans, a study by Sundeen, Garcia, and Raskoff (2009) focused on volunteering among native-born and first generation White Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans and the effect of acculturation on personal and social resources, as well as gender and age on formal volunteering among the groups. Acculturation is the process by which individuals and groups change in adapting to demands in their changing environment (Berry, 1997). Using 2004 survey data, from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, a total of 20,068 volunteers and 39,820 non-volunteers were analyzed. The sample’s size was disaggregated into eight subsamples: native-born White Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics Americans. The study focused on answering two questions. First, do ethnic groups differ in their likelihood of volunteering? Second, are these differences a function of acculturation? Using regression analysis, acculturation measured four variables: citizenship status, age of entry of immigrants, generation number, and parental background of native born; personal resources were measured by education, income, and home ownership. Social capital included employment status, family status, and region size. The variable to measure gender was coded as a 1 for male and female as 0. The age variable had a range from 15 to 80.
Sundeen, Garcia, and Raskoff (2009) reported that each native-born and immigrant group had its own unique combination of predictors of volunteering. The results for acculturation, personal and social resources, gender, and age showed that these are associated with both pathways and barriers to volunteering. Additionally, it found that the amount of time spent in one’s new society does not guarantee the likelihood of volunteering for an organization. It depended upon how a group, community, or organization creates opportunities for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender or social class.

A limitation of the study was the quantitative data, which did not allow discussion about differences in gender, age, personal, social resources between White Americans, Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and Asian American groups. Several recommendations suggest that more research is needed to explore why integration into volunteer roles in organizations takes longer among non-whites than among whites. Another is to examine the traditions and practices of volunteering among immigrants and those native-born in the United States. Lastly, this study Sundeen, Garcia, and Raskoff (2009) investigated how traditions and practices affect the likelihood of volunteering among immigrants.

Based on these findings, implications for the dissertation study of senior African Americans would contribute to a better understanding of how different cultures, family dynamics, personal and social resources and religious affiliations, create different pathways to volunteering. African Americans and minority ethnic groups have had to adapt to a pre-existing dominant culture, which does not always embrace their differences. Oftentimes, this cultural disapproval limits one’s ability to successfully
assimilate into a particular group, organization or society; therefore, this might explain why more African American and minority ethnic groups either keep to themselves or remain active within their own race’s groups. Uslander and Conley (2003) theorized that persons with weaker ties to their own ethnic groups develop a greater “generalized trust” and are more likely to participate in the broader society, including voluntary organizations, whereas those who maintain stronger ties to their own group keep to themselves. However, senior African American volunteers selected for this study appeared to have somehow created a pathway to secular, formal volunteering.

Based on the literature review, race and volunteering (as related to human, social and cultural capital) showed mixed results. In some cases, possession of human, social and cultural resources were considered to be different for African Americans and minority groups, as compared to their counterparts. For instance, human capital did not translate into the same amount of status and prestige for African American as it did for whites (Mirowsky & Ross, 1980). Social capital was acquired mostly through the African American church, which is a platform for political and social activism and a gateway to "informal and formal social opportunities, including ties to voluntary associations (Ellison & Sherkat, 1995, p.1417). For cultural capital in “an oppressed minority community, African Americans have been forced to rely heavily on each other for help and have cultivated an ethic of mutual concern and care” (Carson 1989). Furthermore, without either the market or the state to take care of many of their social needs, African Americans have been forced to turn to private philanthropy” (Wilson, Musick, & Bynum, 2000, p.1543). However, how have senior African American volunteers continued to
remain engaged in formal volunteering as changes have occurred in their resources and human, social, and cultural capital affect their formal volunteering status?

The relationship between change and stability in volunteering was addressed by Choi and Chou (2010), who investigated the relationship between time and money (hours and dollars) in formal volunteering of adults 55 years and older. This study used secondary analysis data from two survey years, 1995–96 and 2004–06, U.S. Survey of Midlife Development. The total of participants were 917, aged 55–84, with 90% being non-Hispanic white. An analysis of the participants’ socio-demographic attributes and measures of human, social and cultural capital examined the relationship between changes and stability in volunteering status. Human capital consisted of resources attached to individuals that make productive activities possible: education, household income, health and work. Social capital criteria included the number of attendances at various meetings: union/professional group, sports/social group, and any other group. An indicator for cultural capital was religious identification. Religion identification was used, instead of religious attendance, because some older adults were not able to attend religious service as frequently as they wished due to chronic illness or functional impairments. The results showed that the younger group (aged 55–64 years) was more likely than the older (aged 75–84) to volunteer their time, while the younger was less likely than the older to give money. Choi and Chou’s (2010) further analysis showed the older volunteers were repeat volunteers who gave more time and money, which was significantly more than that of new volunteers. This would suggest that those who volunteer in mid-life are likely to remain volunteers in late life. Second, among older adults higher levels of education were consistent predictors of new engagement, stability
in volunteering and the extent of donations of time and money. Third, social networks measured by the number of meetings attended, was a significant predictor not only of the hours spent volunteering, but also of new engagement and stability in both time and money volunteering. Fourth, a high level of religious identification was strongly associated with motivation for time spent and amount of dollars donated, which was often correlated to the importance of religion to the volunteer.

A limitation of Choi and Chou’s (2010) study worth noting was 90% of participants were non-Hispanic white and 10% comprised all racial ethnic minorities as one group. An oversampling of racial/ethnic minorities is recommended in future research. In closing, the authors recommended three strategies for volunteer recruitment and retention. First, the stability of older adults suggested that voluntary organizations should actively recruit younger and middle aged adults as volunteers. This engagement will likely help volunteers to increase their social and cultural capital resources, which is likely to encourage volunteering in late life. Second, this study proved that repeat volunteers were more likely to give time and money; therefore, more of a focus on retention of volunteers is needed to identify strategies to reduce dropout. Third, promotion of continued social contact and activities among older adults may prevent social isolation due to chronic illness or other functional impairments.

These findings have a strong implication for the dissertation study of senior African American volunteers. The authors noted that race/ethnicity should be addressed in future research. Specific to senior African American volunteers’ time and money is oftentimes associated with the African American church and community concerns. Given this, dissertation study explored what types of secular, formal, voluntary organizations
senior African American volunteers were most likely to contribute their time and money, or to continue to act as repeat volunteers. The authors mentioned that recruitment of younger and middle-aged adults will help decrease social isolation for elders in the community and increase a volunteer social and cultural resource, which is likely to encourage volunteering in late life. Furthermore, the literature suggested that social isolation occurred to those who lacked social and cultural capital resources. However, a volunteer can experience social isolation within a voluntary organization. In fact, paid and unpaid work structures usually engage individuals who possess a dominant social status, which might intentionally or unintentional create “silos” of isolation. This can deter others from contributing or discourage referrals to recruit diversity.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter included a review of the literature on the relationship of human, social, and cultural capital to volunteering. Too often, it is assumed that being a member of a voluntary organization means that individual social and cultural capital resources are being met. More cultural competence is needed to develop retention and recruitment for cohesive and collaborative partnerships. None of the studies mentioned in this literature review provided answers to the research question: What are the perceived experiences of senior African Americans who participate in secular, formal volunteering? Nor do they examine the effects of human, social, or cultural resources related to senior African American volunteers and their access and participation in volunteer activities. Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the methodology used to investigate these questions.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to present the experiences of retired senior African Americans who participated in secular, formal volunteering. Wilson and Musick (1997) developed a comprehensive Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work to explain formal volunteering; however, to date, little is known about the distinct personal experiences of senior African American volunteers who are engaged in nonreligious, formal volunteering. Wilson and Musick’s (1997) theory may provide some insight into the formal volunteering by senior African Americans. Research suggested that African Americans have a different pathway to formal volunteering based on their level of human, social, and cultural capital (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000). Getting a clearer understanding of their pathway may lead to improved access and participation of senior African American volunteers in formal volunteering. The research question for this qualitative study was: What are the perceived experiences of senior African Americans who participate in secular, formal volunteering?

Chapter 3 presents a rationale for the methodology used in this study, a description of where the study took place, the participants, and the procedure for the selection of them. This chapter contains sections that identify the focus group protocol and the process for collecting, managing, analyzing and storing data. The timeline for all research design activities is described.
Research Methodology

A qualitative research method, using focus groups, was used as a means for exploring and understanding the phenomena related to senior volunteering and its perceived benefits for African Americans. Specifically, this research utilized Miles and Huberman’s (1994) qualitative approach, which “allows the researcher to locate the meaning that people place on events, processes and structures in their lives” (p.10). Focus group interviews are considered an excellent method for gathering information when group participants are given opportunities to express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions in a non-disruptive way (Krueger, 1994; Mason, 1996). Therefore, in this study, focus group interviews were used to provide opportunities for African American seniors to share their stories and experiences through group interaction. Focus groups allowed for probing deeper into the subject matter, which was not always possible through other structured methodologies, such as mail-out questionnaires and surveys (Krueger, 1994). More often than not in this study, focus group interviews inherently encouraged dialogue and conversational exchanges that often prompted participants to investigate their own attitudes, perceptions, and experiences on the given topic or subject area (Kruegar, 1994; Morgan, 1998). Thus, the primary objective of qualitative research is to contribute knowledge by exploring, identifying, and examining the researched phenomenon.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), there are strengths and weaknesses with every research method. The literature indicated limitations of qualitative research, which includes the possibility of research bias, generalizing of findings, credibility and quality of conclusions, and utility to the world of policy and action. Other limitations may arise because of the researcher’s role as the main “measurement device” in the study. The
researcher must be aware of influences that may shape his or her values and must take care to not allow them to compromise the role as an impartial data collector.

**Researcher Positionality**

The following personal statement describes the researcher, an African American female, approaching this dissertation study with previous experience as a volunteer both in the corporate and nonprofit sectors. The author’s specific interest in African American senior volunteers was sparked by two reasons: (a) experience as the only African American officer of a corporate-sponsored volunteer organization that had a limited representation of African Americans participating in company volunteer activities, and (b) experience with a senior citizen mother who is a non-volunteer. Later, the chapter discusses strategies to limit the author’s biases.

Since the researcher belonged to a different generation and socioeconomic group than the members of the study in senior volunteers, the researcher’s previous experiences with older adults were relatively limited to conversations with grandparents and retired parents of friends. The researcher’s interest really stems from not seeing her mother have the same quality of life that the researcher had observed and read in the literature by those who volunteer. Over the years, the researcher watched her mother become socially isolated, resulting in increased sickness, weight loss, and over-dependence on family. One year ago, the researcher moved her mother into senior subsidized housing, providing an opportunity for social engagement. To date, her experience living in subsidized housing has not changed her disengagement. For instance, she said that tenants are unfriendly; something as simple as saying “hello” is rarely exchanged. Furthermore, she said that when walking in the hallways, separate groups of Black, White, and Latino
seniors are socializing in their inner circles. It is disturbing to think that living with other seniors would not help seniors to avoid isolation through increased social engagement.

**Human networks and cultural ties.** At the time of this study, the researcher was unemployed and was limited by certain social and cultural resources to facilitate the recruitment of African American volunteers in a timely manner. However, the cultural capital needed to recruit senior African Americans for this study was grueling. The questioning of African Americans required a response to the following questions: What college did I attend? Did I belong to a sorority? Where do I attend church? Did I belong to any Black professional organizations? Where do I reside?

Moving forward, the researcher asked for advice from prospective participants to develop strategies to offset social and cultural limitations. The recommendations received were as follows: First, learn about African American history and its impact in Rochester, New York. It was assumed that the researcher would have this knowledge and be aware of influential community leaders. Second, volunteer in a church that is predominately African American. Third, join a sorority. The Black church and ethnic associations are ways to gain social capital, to stay abreast of concerns, and to earn the respect of the African American community. Fourth, eliminate the need for individuals who do want to put forth the effort and time to meet in a room. Volunteering in the African American community is informal and getting all individuals to meet in one area proved to be harder than expected. In this century, recruitment of volunteers, especially of the caliber needed for this study, has shown various time constraints. A researcher should consider a one-on-one interview or teleconferencing, which might have facilitated the recruitment of African Americans in a timely manner. Fifth, broaden research participant criteria and
volunteer to meet people at their volunteer locations. In some cases, going where volunteers provided the service made it easier to recruit participants. In other cases, if the volunteer activity were performed at the individual level, as in a food pantry and mentoring, then scheduling a focus group proved to be challenging. Often, historical experiences of African Americans’ access and barriers like racial discrimination have shaped their lives; therefore, having cultural sensitivity is imperative.

In this regard, qualitative data collected through focus groups enabled more complex aspects of a person’s experiences to be studied. The most reported common strength of the qualitative approach has been “the depth to which explorations are conducted and descriptions are written. This usually results in sufficient details for the reader to grasp the ‘crux of the situation’” (Meyer, 2000, p. 12). This researcher focused on uncovering knowledge about how officially retired African American volunteers perceived experiences in formal volunteering. Hopefully, the results from this study adds to the literature on African American seniors’ perception about volunteerism.

The Research Context

This section presents the location and situational factors for this research. This study took place in Monroe County in Western New York. Monroe County is located within 400 miles of 14 northeastern states. Unlike most Western New York counties, this one enjoys many cultural attractions and a diverse range of socioeconomic communities. The National Center for Charitable Statistics (2010) reported there are approximately 4,042 nonprofits in Monroe County.

As in the rest of the United States, the numbers of adults who are aged 65 or older is growing in Monroe County. According to the 2010 Census, ages 60 to 84 increased by
to almost 122,000 residents. The number of seniors living in Monroe County is spread out with 7% from 55 to 59, 18% from 60 to 84 and 28% who were 85 years of age or older. Overall demographics of the county showed 113,171 (15.2%) African Americans, 566,535 (76.1%) White Americans, 2,136 (0.3%) Native Americans, 24,281 (3.3%) Asian Americans, 227 (0.0 %) Pacific Islander, and 19,109 (2.6%) two or more races. Those of Latino origin were 7.1% or 54,005 of the population. In Monroe County, volunteer opportunities existed in four areas: (a) sports and outdoor activities, (b) youth organizations, (c) parent organizations, and (d) neighborhood organizations. When reviewing data by race and ethnicity group, blacks participated in 28% of parent organizations and 28% of neighborhood associations. Latino’s participation ranged from 19% in parent organizations and 13% in neighborhood associations

Research Participants

Creswell (1998) suggested that the qualitative method is designed for smaller sample populations and is rich in descriptive data and inductive reasoning from the participants’ points of view. This theory supported data collection of this study. Participant samples for this study were senior African American volunteers who were: (a) retired, (b) born between 1923 and 1946 (55-79 years old), and (c) actively engaged in formal volunteering with a nonprofit organization. Senior African American volunteers were recruited through a purposive sampling frame; that is, participants were selected after aspects of the study had been defined. Qualitative samples tend to be purposive, rather than random (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Creswell (2003) wrote, “The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that will best help the researcher
to understand the research question” (p. 185). This sampling design was appropriate and necessary because the focus group protocol question sought to identify what senior African Americans reported as their perceived experiences of their volunteer activities.

A total of 14 volunteers were recruited from a social service organization. The study included four focus groups: two groups from a social service organization—a Pilot Group and Group A—and two additional Focus Groups, B and C. The participants for the latter two groups represented a number of formal volunteer organizational experiences including: voluntary health and welfare organizations, neighborhood action groups, and employer-supported volunteer programs.

**Recruitment.** The following recruitment strategies were employed. First, the researcher secured the assistance of a scholar at St. John Fisher College who identified several volunteer coordinators who could identify potential volunteers for the focus groups. Second, the researcher relied on the *Local Business Journal* (pseudonym) as a resource to target volunteer coordinators at nonprofit organizations. A list was identified and the coordinators were contacted. The researcher explained the objective for this study of senior African American volunteers. Third, the researcher solicited and contacted several individuals based on personal referrals. The researcher used social media such as LinkedIn and Facebook, and also posted fliers at locations identified by referrals as frequented by retired African American volunteers. Moreover, all focus group participants were asked for other referrals, and any persons mentioned were contacted.

The first method identified secured participants for two focus group sessions. Each of the focus group sessions included seven active but retired African American volunteers from a social service organization, and the sessions were conducted at their
organizational location. The other methods resulted in the six participants for a third focus group session that was conducted at St. John Fisher College. Of the six participants, one volunteer was recruited from the *Local Business Journal* and the other five by word of mouth. All six participants were high profile, possessed a high socioeconomic level and were actively engaged in nonreligious volunteering in the greater Rochester area. The last method resulted in seven participants for a final focus group session that was conducted at a library. All seven participants were high profile, possessed a high socioeconomic status, and were highly regarded African American volunteers in the Rochester community.

**Pilot study.** On December 8, 2011, the researcher met with a community–based supervisor at a social service organization to explain the purpose of the research study, how confidentiality would be maintained, how the data would be collected and protected, and the criteria for the participants, and how the focus group sessions would be conducted. Volunteers from the social service agency who met the requirements were identified and asked to participate in the study via an invitation (Appendix A) explaining the details of the study. The participants that agreed to be in the study were given an informed consent form to complete (Appendix B).

The social service organization, a family resource center located in Rochester, New York, is a 501C3 nonprofit human service agency. This social service agency was founded in 1989 by a grandmother struggling to raise her grandchildren. The mission of the program is to provide support and resources to kinship caregivers, including grandparents raising their grandchildren in the Rochester, New York area. The term “kinship care” in this study refers to an adult who is related to a child by family ties, such
as grandmothers who are taking full responsibility of raising their grandchildren. Volunteers of the social service organization, who are also raising grandchildren, complete a 15-week training curriculum to become leaders and role models to other grandparents raising grandchildren. The trained volunteer provides one-on-one support and monthly home visits to other kinship caregivers. Volunteers help isolated caregivers with access to community services, teach parenting and advocacy skills, recruit new members by attending open houses at schools, and staff the social service agency display booth at Family Court and the Department of Social Services of Monroe County. Family Court is a court system that hears matters and makes orders in relation to family law such as custody of children who lack responsible parents. Prior to the focus groups, a pilot study was conducted to assess the clarity of the research questions. The pilot focus group study allowed the researcher to test interview questions, practice facilitating a focus group, and monitor the time to complete a focus group session and to anticipate potential questions or difficulties that could arise.

The completion of the pilot study provided a trial run for the group interview process. The pilot confirmed the time estimates that had been established for the focus groups needed to be adjusted. For example, it was determined that it might be necessary to expedite responses to the initial questions about how one became involved in volunteering in order to allow more time for other participants to respond to how they felt about their volunteer experience and how non-volunteers might be encouraged to volunteer.

Since there was a limited time to address each question, the first question, “Tell me about your volunteer experiences,” was omitted. It was not replaced with another
question because there were sub questions to cover the initial deleted question. Participants did not respond in a timely manner, which resulted in not having enough time to ask all of the questions. Thus, the researcher did not use this question for focus Groups A, B, or C sessions.

**Pilot participants.** On January 4, 2012, a pilot focus group was held in a classroom at the social service organization. This location was an accessible classroom that allowed participants to speak freely about their life experiences, resulting perceptions, and attitudes on volunteerism. From the beginning of the focus group discussion there was camaraderie among the participants. Participants greeted each other with a warm smile, and their conversations described the loyalty and long-lasting friendships that had developed from the social service organization. Participants stated that they had also volunteered for projects in the past, but never received information about the outcome, and they asked the researcher for a report highlighting the findings and results of this study.

The demographic questionnaire revealed one organizational genre where participants volunteered, namely community-based organizations. The community organizations were schools, support groups, neighborhood block clubs and religious organizations. The average volunteer hours per week spent were three hours over a 15 year time span for two organizations.

**Institutional Review Board**

In accordance with Saint John Fisher College research policy, an application and proposal summarizing the research focus and design, a participant consent form, a copy of the demographic survey, and the focus group protocol questions were submitted for
“Expedited Review” to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at St. John Fisher College. The researcher received an electronic approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at St. John Fisher College on November 9, 2011. As part of IRB approval, informed consent and participant schedule forms were collected from each retired African American volunteer prior to participation in the study.

**Instruments Used to Gather Data Collection**

**Demographic background questionnaire.** The demographic data questionnaire was a four-page document for biographical data information and current and past formal volunteer activities (Appendix C). Prior to each focus group session, participants were given the demographic questionnaire. The demographic data questionnaire information was used in conjunction with focus groups protocol questions.

**Data Collection Method**

**Focus group interview protocol.** The focus group protocol questions (Appendix D) were aligned to the study’s research question and were typed on a sheet of paper to ensure that the researcher asked each focus group participants all four questions. Open-ended questions were developed to gain a deeper understanding of senior African American volunteer experiences. The interview protocol helped the researcher to minimize leading questions or directing participants to answer the questions in a particular manner. This allowed the participants to express their perceptions and opinions in their own words.

In regards to qualitative research, Krueger (1994) and Mason (1996) recommended that researchers carefully develop research questions in order to generate meaningful and useful data. That is, research questions should be an integral part of
qualitative research. Good research questions combined with strong interview protocols allowed the researcher to highlight the experiences that senior African American volunteers identified as contributing to the benefits they have received from volunteering, along with the perceived barriers to volunteering. Therefore, every attempt was made to pinpoint the factors that most influenced senior African Americans who decide to participate in volunteering.

The first question was based on the literature on volunteering. The first prompt, “How did you acquire the skills needed to volunteer for a particular organization?” as an open-ended question to help set the stage for the focus group interview. The participants had the opportunity to go back in time and remember when they were first introduced to volunteering. Empirical research on human capital was one dimension of Wilson and Musick’s (1997) Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work. Human capital refers to those resources attached to individuals that make volunteering possible (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Three important aspects of human capital are education, income and health (Wilson, 2000); with education being one of the most significant predictors of the involvement of seniors in volunteer work (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993). As the education level of participants increases, so does the level of volunteer activity. The more education an individual obtains, the more aware one is of social problems (Wilson, 2000).

To address the other two aspects of human capital, income and health, sub questions were developed. To explore income as a resource, the sub question asked, “Does anything limit your ability to volunteer as much as you like?” (Caro & Bass, 1995; Fisher & Schaffer, 1993; Herzog & Morgan, 1993; Musick, Herzog, and House, 1999). The researcher noted that socioeconomic status (SES) was another significant factor
associated with a greater likelihood for volunteering participation.” Do you feel you missed any opportunities to volunteer?” If so, why? This sub question was useful to examine the health status of the participants. Research suggested that volunteering has health benefits. Additionally, it stated those older adults who are in good health tend to volunteer more than their counterparts do.

The second question, “How did you find out about volunteering?” explored Wilson and Musick’s (1997) social capital, which is another dimension of The Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work. Social capital was supported by the idea that “individuals and groups can gain resources from their connections to one another” (p. 698). The literature suggested that African Americans do not have the same access to volunteer opportunities that whites do. According to Musick and Wilson (2008), “The voluntary sector is somewhat racially segregated, and there are abundant volunteer opportunities for members of racial and ethnic minority groups within their own racial and ethnic communities” (p. 209). However, empirical research suggested that people from ethnic minority groups are actively engaged in informal helping at the community level (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1996; Niyazi 1996).

One reason for their lower rates of participation in formal volunteering is simply that they do not get asked to volunteer (Ferree et al. 1998; Hodgkinson 1995). In the United States, formal volunteering is predominantly a white and middle-class activity, with non-white minority groups asked less often to participate.

The third question, “What values do you hold that volunteering helps you fulfill?” was to explore cultural capital, which was the third component of Wilson and Musick’s (1997) Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work. Religious organizations are one of the
primary sources for older Americans’ service; incorporating 46.7% of adult volunteers aged 65 years and older (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Furthermore, 39% of African Americans reported that the membership of voluntary associations most important to them is mostly all Black (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

The fourth question “Is there anything else you would like to tell me about volunteering?” was the final question asked prior to ending the focus group session. The question was designed to give senior African American volunteers an opportunity to add additional information that was not covered in the initial focus group about volunteering.

**Procedures Used**

Prospective volunteers were sent a cover letter via email that introduced the purpose for the study as well as the benefits associated with the completion of the study. Multiple methods were used for data collection. Data for this qualitative research was obtained through questionnaire information and focus groups’ observation and perceptions.

**Three focus group sessions.** Qualitative research aspires to achieve “trustworthiness” during evaluation. ... Terms often used to convey a sense of believability in a qualitative research design project ... authenticity, and credibility (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To convey trustworthiness, three focus groups were used to obtain a diversity of perspectives, eliminate the researcher’s possible biases, and to reach saturation of the focus groups’ participant data.

The three data gathering techniques that were used included three focus group sessions of senior African American volunteers from (a) a social service organization and
(b) Groups B and C of officially retired volunteers to increase the trustworthiness of this study.

The focus group sessions then involved a two-tiered approach: (a) building a rapport with the participants by ensuring confidentiality and explaining that their participation would be voluntary, and (b) open-ended questions would be asked in the interview sessions in an effort to solicit rich dialogue amongst participants in the groups.

The focus groups were audio-taped. Each interview sessions were transcribed by the researcher within three days. The typed transcriptions were photocopied; one copy of each typed transcription was secured by placing it in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s residence. At the conclusion of each of the focus group session, participants were served refreshments: water and juice, donuts, bagels, muffins, cookies and pizza. Additionally, participants were given a $10.00 gift card from Wegmans (a local grocery with pharmacy) as a token of appreciation for their participation in the study. After each focus group, the researcher interpreted the information using Wilson and Musick (1997) Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work. To ensure trustworthiness of the data, the researcher employed strategies to minimize bias. The researcher employed a scribe.

**Scribe.** The task for the scribe was to review focus group protocols with the researcher, to accompany the researcher at the focus group sessions and to make sure each focus group was duly recorded with participants labeled appropriately. Additionally, the scribe assisted in room set-up and post session clean-up, distributed and collected forms, and helped facilitator to stay on schedule.
Following each focus group session, the researcher and scribe held a debriefing session to review what they had seen and heard, and to determine whether any additional information was required or desired for the field research materials.

The scribe and peer reviewer for this study was Dr. William J. Daniels, a retired professor, academic administrator, researcher and life-long volunteer. He has an extensive record of research and scholarship including publications and book reviews for *Congressional Quarterly; Presidential Studies Quarterly; University of Illinois Press; National Political Science Review; Charles Scribner's and Sons; The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, Perspectives in Political Science; American Political Science Review; Radiant Press; Albany Law Review; Black Law Journal [UCLA]; Texas Southern University Law Review; W.H. Freeman and Company; Politics; Greenwood Press, presentations at annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, the Northeastern Political Association, the Midwest Political Science Association, the New York State Political Science Association, the Southern Political Science Association, and the Capital District American Association for Public Administration.

Dr. Daniels has a life-long volunteer service record, including volunteer service with the Center for Dispute Settlement (Livingston and Monroe Counties); RocCity Scholars Program Board of Directors; Hillside Children's Center, Board of Directors; Rochester-Monroe County Freedom Trail Commission; Urban League of Rochester, New York, Board of Directors; member, Rochester Police Civilian Review Board; Association of American Colleges and Universities, Board of Directors; elected State Representative
for the New York State Citizens Utility Board; Citizens for Law Order, and Justice, Board of Directors; and mentor, Joseph Wilson Magnet High School, Rochester, New York.

Dr. Daniels, an African American, who holds a doctorate in Public Law and Judicial Politics, was also selected as the scribe for this research project because of his ability to identify with the generation of senior volunteer participants, who are the focus of this study.

**Data Analysis**

**Writing the analysis.** Writing the analysis used the theoretical framework of Wilson and Musick (1997) whose Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work served this dissertation as themes from the data analysis process to summarize and reflect on the complexity of the data. This is an interpretive act, which lends itself to forming meaning for large amount of raw data.

The process of data analysis was interwoven in the collection of data to allow for continuous refinement of complex data as the study proceeded (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It was crucial to have understood the dynamics of each particular case before proceeding to cross-case explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In qualitative research, it should be assured that all responses are accurately reported and represented, and multiple sources should be used to triangulate the data to increase the study’s credibility (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The research questions and the related literature for this study guided the process of data analysis by assisting the researcher to identify appropriate categories and themes. A basic qualitative analysis process, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), was followed. Steps included:
1. affixing one to several word codes to the interview transcripts in the left-hand margins;

2. noting reflections and other remarks in the right-hand margins;

3. sorting and sifting through the materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes and common sequences;

4. elaborating on a small set of generalizations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database; and confronting these generalizations with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories.

To accomplish this, all data collected by the researcher was categorized and synthesized. The researcher analyzed the verbatim transcripts, which were coded by using the three phases of coding described by Miles and Huberman (1994), starting with open coding. First, in the “open coding” phase, the transcripts were reviewed with the aim of identifying categories in the data that were mentioned by multiple participants. During the “open coding” phase, the researcher reviewed the transcripts first, as the primary coder, with the goal of identifying categories in the data that were presented by multiple members of the sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These identified categories made up the initial coding framework.

The second phase of coding described by Miles and Huberman (1994) is axial coding, in which the data is analyzed to try to find interconnections between categories identified in the first phase of coding. Only significant statements that were directly pertinent to the theoretical framework of Wilson’s and Musick (1997) Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work were extracted. Data analysis using a qualitative approach is an iterative process, so the researcher aimed to saturate the categories identified by using the
constant comparative approach. Categories were developed starting with the first transcripts analyzed, but as subsequent interviews were analyzed, categories were revisited to see how new data fit into existing categories, and whether additional categories needed to be created to accommodate different findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). One aim of the study was to compare and contrast the perceptions of volunteer experiences of senior African American volunteers. Therefore, one important aspect of data analysis was comparing the experiences and perceptions of all the volunteers. The dissimilarities and similarities in their experiences contributed to a comprehensive understanding of retired African American volunteers’ pathways to formal volunteering.

The final phase of coding, selective coding, sought to create a story that explains the experience of the individuals within the sample that is informed by the interconnections that have been drawn among categories. Between the first and second phase of coding the reliability assessment was performed as described below.

**Peer reviewer.** To reduce the risk of bias on researcher’s bias, a peer reviewer was used to increase trustworthiness by providing feedback at several critical junctures during the execution of the study. The reliability for the coding process was verified for trustworthiness, by having a peer reviewer (Dr. Daniels) evaluate the data. The peer reviewer for the study served an invaluable purpose by assisting in the development of codes; helping to make sense of the materials and maximizing the worth of the findings. It was important for the peer reviewer to be familiar with the research project, and to be as free as possible from biases or subjectivities of his or her own in order to maximize their worth to the researcher. The peer reviewer confirmed that it was preferable to not use personal observations to recount participants’ perceptions of formal volunteering.
experiences. Dr. Daniels, a colleague, examined the data both with the researcher and independently. The peer reviewer coded the transcriptions independently from the researchers’ coded transcriptions to determine if there was an alignment of affirmations and themes. The peer reviewer provided an additional measure of reliability and trustworthiness to the study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) explained, “definitions become sharper when two researchers code the same data set and discuss their initial difficulties. A disagreement indicates that a definition is needed to expanded or otherwise amended” (p. 64). After establishing the coding framework for the introductory questions, both researcher and peer reviewer (Dr. Daniels) separately and manually reviewed the transcripts. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that, at first, intercoder reliability is rarely above 70% (p. 64). Using the transcripts, we manually calculated a percentage of agreement based on the following equation from Miles and Huberman (1994): reliability = number of agreements/total number of agreements + disagreements by dividing the total number of non-overlapping references for all transcripts by the total number of references for all transcripts, we calculated our percentage of agreement to be 86%. The rest of the initial coding was completed for all transcripts by the researcher.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the purpose and design of the study was described. The methods of data collection and analysis were detailed. In summary, the study used a qualitative research method that employed focus group protocol questions. The researcher served as the facilitator for each group. By following a systematic process for collecting and analyzing data, the researcher sought to understand the research question, “What are the
Chapter 4: Findings

In this section, a detailed description of the experiences of officially retired African American volunteers is provided. Responses and main themes are described applying Wilson’s and Musick (1997) Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work, including: human, social and cultural capital.

The comparison analysis across three groups revealed that social and cultural capital were the most commonly reported factors that facilitated African Americans being asked to participate in formal volunteering. For Group A, Grandmothers in the Trenches, the key areas were (a) school, (b) community, and (c) support group ties. The most commonly reported factors that facilitated being asked to volunteer for Group B, Getting Down to Business were (a) family ties, (b) church ties, (c) work ties, and (d) community ties. Finally, the venues for Group C, Setting the Record Straight were (a) organization ties, (b) social network ties, (c) community ties, and (d) work ties. It is worth noting that community ties emerged as the only significantly recurring theme for all the focus groups.

This study explored the volunteer experiences of African American adults (ages 55 and older, with volunteer experience) in nonreligious organizations. The research question guiding this qualitative study was: “What are the perceived experiences of senior African Americans who participate in secular, formal volunteering?”
Characteristics for Participants Summary

Table 4.1 presents volunteer characteristics of all participants in the three focus groups: Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches*; Group B, *Getting Down To Business*; and Group C, *Setting the Record Straight*. Twenty officially retired African Americans participated in the study. There were five male and 15 female volunteers ranging in age from 55 to 79 years. The majority of participants were between 55 to 64 years of age.

A summary of the participants’ levels of education prior to retirement is also found in Table 4.1. The levels of education for Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches*, who were of a lower socioeconomic background, ranged from a high school diploma to a bachelor’s degree. Group B, *Getting Down to Business* and Group C, *Setting the Record Straight* were from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. These participants’ level of education was a broad range of advanced degrees, from bachelor to doctorate degrees.

From the work history of this sample, the survey questionnaire revealed that all participants’ occupations before retirement included both blue and white-collar positions which ranged from an administrative position to a chief executive officer. The annual income levels fluctuated from under $25,000 to over $150,000. The reported health status for all groups ranged from fair to excellent.

Interestingly, Table 4.1 showed that volunteer participation, regardless of socioeconomic status and education levels were most significant among those in the age category 55 to 64 years old. Most widely accepted knowledge from studies for gender differences is that women are more likely to participate overall in volunteer work than men (Bussell & Forbes, 2001; Choi, Burr, Mutchler, & Caro, 2007; Herzog, Kahn, Morgan, Jackson, & Antonucci, 1989; Marriott Senior Living Services, 1991; Musick,
1997; Wilson, 2000). Some other studies have reported that males volunteer more than females (Wilson, 2000), but often cited for the gender specific difference in volunteering is that “women consistently rate themselves (and are rated by other) as more empathic and altruistic than men” (Greeno & Maccoby, 1993, p.195). Women are also more often referred to as nurturers or caretakers, and they see volunteerism as an extension of their roles as mothers and housewives (Wilson, 2000). The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) reported that women volunteer at a higher rate (29.9%), than men do (23.5%).

Nonetheless, results of this study revealed that, when it comes to gender, African American women, even after education was taken into consideration, were more likely to participate in volunteering. In this sample, the participants from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were highly recognized African American (both male and female) professionals and volunteers in the Rochester community, whereas the lower socioeconomic participants were all females who were not that visible in the volunteer community.

**Grandmothers in the Trenches**

The group characteristics are head-of-household grandmothers who are isolated because they had suddenly become the primary caregiver for raising their grandchildren or great grandchildren. The circumstances for each grandmother varied widely: for instance, the parent may have abandoned the child, had abused drugs, had been imprisoned, or had been separated from their children by divorce, illness or death. Additionally, the grandmothers were faced with social, physical, emotional, and legal problems, and they experienced economic difficulty, which compounded the problem in
trying to raise their grandchildren. Due to their limited education and income, their social network ties did not extend beyond their social groups.

Table 4.1

*Characteristics of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group A, Grandmothers in the Trenches</th>
<th>Group B, Getting Down to Business</th>
<th>Group C, Setting the Record Straight</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 55-64</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 65-69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 70-79</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 20.*

Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches*, was held mid–morning on January 4, 2012, in the same classroom as the pilot group. The researcher noticed that the
participants’ facial expressions expressed curiosity and nervousness. This dissipated after a warm introduction was made. The camaraderie of these grandmothers did not appear to be as strong as was true of the pilot group. However, overhearing side conversations reflected a common theme among these grandmothers, which was their caregiving responsibilities. For this focus group session, the researcher made a conscious decision to address several sub-questions that were not addressed in the pilot group.

The demographic questionnaire revealed one organizational genre where participants volunteered, namely community-based organizations. The community organizations were schools, support groups, and neighborhood associations. The average volunteer hours per week spent were three hours over a fifteen year time span for two organizations.

**Human capital.** Wilson and Musick (1997) defined human capital as work relevant skills and material resources residing within an individual that make him or her valuable in the volunteer labor marketplace. Resources of prospective volunteers that make them attractive to organizations include education, income, employment, experience, skills and physical capacity. Education as a human resource has been a robust predictor of being a volunteer over time (Choi, 2003; Harootyan, 1996). The responses that played into human capital include education, health, age, time and health.

**Education.** Previous volunteering research has shown that the most common factor affecting the involvement of older adults (<75) in volunteer work is education (Fischer, et al., 1991; Marriott Senior Living Services, 1991). Females--who are married, have higher levels of education, high income, good health, and religious affiliation--are more likely to participate in volunteering (Herzog & Morgan, 1993; Caro & Bass, 1995;
Kim & Hong, 1997; Wilson & Musick, 1997; Tang, 2006). When *Grandmothers in the Trenches* were asked, “How did you acquire the skills needed to volunteer for a particular organization? Surprisingly, the majority of narratives revealed that participants acquired their skills through non-traditional education activities. Due to family commitments, most grandparents were limited in participating in volunteer service outside of their family networks. For those grandparents involved in community work, the services provided by the organizations were reciprocated. All participants responded they obtained sufficient skills needed to volunteer from their life experiences. One volunteer stated:

> Common sense told me what had to be done. I had no training. Just mother’s wit. I did not know what kinds of skills were required. I would go to the Foodlink community center and prepare bags of food to be distributed twice a month to families in the community. The volunteers did not get paid, but we did get two bags of food. (A2)

Waiting to respond, another grandmother replied:

> I learned through joining a parents’ group. I started volunteering with the city [Rochester, New York] school district New Careers program because I had children in school. I became an aide like a paraprofessional. (A4)

**Income.** Another factor affecting the increased involvement of seniors in volunteer work is income. Greater income gives volunteers increased financial resources which may give them a greater ability to volunteer. With greater income, potential barriers decrease, such as transportation costs or the need to spend more time in paid employment. Analysis of the questionnaire provided a snapshot of the family household
income of the retired focus Group A grandmothers. Income levels ranged from under $25,000 to $39,000, which is reflective of blue collar occupations.

One of the respondents noted the financial hardships and caregiving responsibilities that come with raising her grandchildren. In a quest to advocate for financial resources, a social service volunteer, extremely frustrated with the process, stated:

We would travel to Albany and Washington to meet the senators and congressmen. We were trying to get the federal government to help us pay for school tuition because a lot of people could not pay for it. . . . These efforts never worked. (A2)

Also, there are volunteers who expected to be paid for their volunteer efforts. The importance of income was exemplified by one female, who responded with a high-pitched voice:

Unlike “Ms. Freehearted”, if I work I want to get paid. You know, I did not want anything to do with volunteering. You know, I always said if I work, I want to get paid. You got to pay me. (A7)

To further explain why she felt this way, the volunteer stated, “I had just retired; my children had completed college and were living on their own”. Enthusiastically, she added:

Wow! I got my own money again. I can do what I want to do because everybody is grown. But the Lord had a different plan for me because I ended up with these two kids: a little girl who turned six and a little boy aged nine. However, back then, I was younger, and I did not want to be involved with raising two
grandchildren. I wanted to make money, but it is not all about that after all. Right now, I really and truly love to volunteer and go to the courthouse to bring other people into the program so they can get help and support. (A7)

Additionally, age, time, and health are all related to human capital theory (Wilson & Musick 1997). As individuals age, their stock of resources tends to diminish, which may affect volunteering participation and performance.

**Age.** In terms of age, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011), among the different age groups, those between 35 to 44 were the most likely to volunteer, closely followed by 45- to 54-year olds and 55 to 64 years old. Rates were lowest among persons in their early twenties and among those ages 65 and over. Within the latter group, rates decreased as age increased. The data from the questionnaire show the age group for the seven female participants were 55-79 years old. However, these grandmothers had no intention in ceasing their volunteer participation. In the context of their own aging, many felt that it was a real blessing to be able to volunteer. A female shared:

> A lot of people cannot take “feel good” to the grocery store or pay bills with it. In my old age, I am beginning to believe that it is a gift that I have and I have to share it. Yes, you can pay me a bunch of money, but, hummm; it is more than that … it is something that you have to do. (A4)

**Health.** One of the major reasons why some individuals are not able to volunteer is lack of good health. None of the participants reported that health deterred them from being engaged in volunteer work. A female volunteer who had become increasingly careful about her involvement in light of health concerns and limitations, asserted:
As you get older and your health changes, you begin to have things happen that you did not have when you were younger. So that can make your time a little shorter to volunteer. I am speaking because I know we are all getting older except for female number two. But it does slow you down, so I am trying to give as many hours to volunteering as I can. (A6)

**Time.** As stated in the literature, volunteering is done in a person’s discretionary time. Generally, older adults who are no longer in the workforce have more discretionary time to engage in activities such as volunteering (Moen, 2003). Having a lack of time can inhibit seniors’ ability to volunteer. An alternative expectation is that because ethnic minority groups frequently devote more time to informal helping of family and neighbors, they will be more likely than whites-- when controlling for income, employment, and other indicators of financial resources-- to state that they lack time to volunteer in an organization. Larger volunteer organizations frequently require a minimum time commitment, which is attached to volunteer roles. Spoken by a female volunteer:

I can understand that sometimes you have to sacrifice something of yourself to be of service to others. But a lot of people don’t want to volunteer because they have other things on their agenda. For instance, if I have a hundred things to do and someone asks me to volunteer, where in these 24 hours do I sacrifice something? Do I let the kids feed themselves while I go and do something? However, if you are not in the place, and a lot aren’t because we got a million things to worry about, you do it grudgingly, but I guess it gets done. (A4)

Another agitated volunteer noted:
You only have so many hours in a day. You have other responsibilities, and you have to make time for a little of everything. Yes! There are times that I wish I could do more, but we all can’t do everything; we have to do what is in our limits.

(A2)

And another exclaimed:

Two of my grandchildren came from California to visit for the summer. When it was time for them to return home, I called their mother and the phone was disconnected. I sent a postcard and it came back “return to sender”. She had disappeared. If it were not for a lady telling me about a social service program, I would still be walking around in a daze because the school did not want to take them for X amount of time because they had no birth certificates and no shots records. (A7)

To demonstrate the time involved with caregiving she informed us:

This was really tough to find the time to run from work to school. You know, they were going through stuff. They would cry because they could not understand where their mom was. And I was crying because I did not know what I was going to do with these little people. (A7)

She mentioned being stretched to the limits with demands on her time from work, school and the stress from taking care of grandchildren. Taking a breath, she added:

The little boy would get into fights. I would have to leave my job a lot and go to the school. At my job, I was told that I needed to take care of this. So I am going to be very, very honest about this with you. One day, I took this little boy home and we had a conversation. I told him that I was tired because his mother had disappeared, and his father was locked up, which is my son. I said that I can’t lose
my job and that I am giving him one more chance. Well, he did not listen. The next time, when the school called me…. I don’t know who was more tired, me or him. When I took him back to school, we did not have any more trouble out of him. Wow! Man, I really thought I was going to enjoy my life. I am going to travel and do all that stuff, but it just was not for me at that time. (A7)

In the narratives, grandmothers reported loss of their personal time. The combination of obligations, such as paid work and family roles, prevented these grandmothers from participating in valued social activities with their partners and friends. Additionally, not having enough time negatively affected the mental and physical well-being of these grandmothers. Often times, the participants’ issues consisted of making sacrifices, such as taking time away from their jobs to care for grandchildren. In turn, this unexpected parenting duty resulted in a financial burden and disrupted any plans that the grandmothers had for their retirement.

Social capital. Social capital refers to the resources that are derived from relationships with other people and organizations including informal and formal social ties (Wilson, 2000). Both informal social resources, such as having children, (Wilson & Musick, 1997) and formal social resources, such as ties to organizations (Harootyan, 1996) increase the likelihood that older adults volunteer. However, in the narratives shared, our grandparents found their access and participation to formal volunteering were first executed through their community. The access and participation of our senior African American volunteers are clustered in six key areas: (a) school ties, (b) family ties, (c) work ties, (d) support ties, (e) group ties, and (f) organizational ties. Of the six key areas, school, community, and support group ties were the main venues in which these
An overwhelming majority of participants stated they needed to resolve a problem, and that led them to initiate their own volunteering opportunities by looking for resources within their communities.

**School ties.** As revealed in the narratives in this study, many of the grandparents interviewed do not refer to themselves as "volunteers" or to their efforts as "volunteering." Their efforts were not something that they consciously identified as volunteer work. Rather, it was something they "just did" because they perceived the need.

Looking a little perplexed, a grandmother replied:

> You are talking about volunteering? At the time, I didn’t even know it was called volunteering. In the 70’s, I had a son who had a hard time going to school. He would be disruptive in the classroom. For six years, I would go and help the teacher with the children in the classroom. (A2)

Another female participant responded:

> I started volunteering with my daughter in elementary school. I was very active with the teachers and principal. We did not have a school teacher aide like they have now; parents were involved. So I initiated my own volunteering. (A2)

Similarly:

> When my kids were born, I started going to Martin Luther King summer school program, eventually, working in the playground and then volunteering in the neighborhood. (A6)

Likewise, a volunteer stated:
Actually, I was the co-chairperson for the Pittsford School District urban-suburban program. Nobody wanted to volunteer, so I kind of did my hand like this [waving] and apparently they saw it. (A7)

Other participants expressed they were recruited after having a child or becoming a caregiver of a grandchild. As stated:

I learned about volunteering when my four-year-old son entered pre-school at ABC HeadStart program. I had just had another child when ABC Headstart recruited me. In this program, I was able to bring her along to participate and volunteer in workshops. (A1)

Nodding her head, the next volunteer stated:

My experience was similar; I was recruited by the ABC Headstart coordinator for the “Looking at Life” program, which provided training for parents. I felt that I was going through the second stage of raising a child. (A4)

**Community ties.** It is argued that the cultural context in which care is given and received is shaped by the legacy of slavery and African traditions. The institution of slavery provided few vehicles for individuals and families to receive support for survival outside of the slave community. Therefore, the availability of social support was internal to the slave community and survival was a group effort. (Berlin, 1998). Much of the community efforts in which these grandparents engaged were about working with and helping others with similar lives, and to help them find their way through their own journeys, while also getting support and satisfaction themselves.

A participant talked about volunteering at the age of 13 at a nursing home. A grandmother commented:
I started volunteering at age 13 in my hometown, Lynchburg, Virginia. It was in a nursing home. Back in the day we called it an old folks’ home. I would go and visit because I knew the type of people that were there needed some help. I would listen to their stories and write out cards for them. This was so rewarding because they were grateful. They would look for me, although I could not go all the time. You know these older people did not have a lot of money to be somewhere else; and their family did not take them in. It seemed like they were pushed aside. (A6)

This same volunteer added:

I would also volunteer to help in the community house. This was a place where they had activities and things for teenagers and Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. I was a Girl Scout of course, and that’s what got me volunteering at the community house. (A6)

Quickly raising her hand, a volunteer responded:

I went to the public library, and I just happened to see a flier about a social service agency. It was a community education flier about parent involvement. The coordinator’s name was in it. That was a program that I was interested in learning more about. That is how I became involved in the social service program. (A1)

Support group ties. Participants’ community ties at the grassroots level helped them to gain access to services for support and resources, and eventually this led to participation in a formal organization. Surprisingly, some of the volunteers’ experiences described a situation where an agency did provide information about volunteer opportunities. One stated:
I was home raising six grandchildren who were in school. I had one of the grandchildren still left at home. There was a lady from Catholic Family Center who would help me with the children. She told me about the social service agency program. I said, “Well I have the baby.” She replied, “That’s all right, we have room for the baby too”. (A2)

With a sense of relief in her voice, she added

I was so relieved. I was not so stressed anymore. I started coming to the program with my grandbaby. I found my healing in coming to the different workshops. I then decided to become a mentor. (A2)

Similarly, a volunteer said:

In 1991, I started volunteering at a social service organization when I got my grandchildren. The child protective worker was the person who recommended the social service program. (A1)

Another said:

I got into a grandparents’ support group. When that program closed, I moved into another group at the Y [YMCA] on Thurston [Road in Rochester, New York]. Every Saturday, we met to share our experience in raising our grandchildren. After that closed, I heard about a social service agency. I started going there when the kids were ages 7, 9 and 11 years old. Once the kids got of age and stopped coming to the program, it was left to us to decide if we wanted to stay in the program. I decided to stay so that I could get and share information with other grandparents. (A5)

An echo:
It is an ongoing healing. Just the camaraderie: we are one big family. I know when I come here we can laugh together, we can cry together, and we can share our most intimate feelings. (A1)

As the above quotes suggest disadvantaged populations create networks with people who have similar problems, but seldom find few resources to escape their current socioeconomic position. The “ties” these grandmothers described are called bonding social capital. According to Putnam (2000), bonding social capital makes connections only among homogenous groups. However, bonding social capital brings the potential for negative consequences, such as, a loss of individual freedom and the exclusion of outsiders. This is referred to by Putnam (2000) as the “dark side” of social capital. Nevertheless, grandmothers in this study found that bonding social capital across multiple groups provided them with essential support networks to manage their lives.

**Cultural capital.** Moreover, a third contributor to volunteer participation was cultural capital, which entails resources derived from our values, moral preferences, and attitudes that steer our actions toward engaging in good deeds. Wilson and Musick (1997) identified altruistic values, moral orientations, and religious values as resources that comprise cultural capital. As for cultural resources, volunteering is often performed differently from one culture to another. The responses in the study related to cultural capital included moral obligations and social responsibilities.

These grandmothers worked hard all of their lives in the service of self and family survival. They described this responsibility in at least one of three ways: spiritual work, an individual desire, and to "give back"-- an ethical duty. Another question asked is “What values are held that volunteering helps you to fulfill?”
Moral obligation. For some, helping others is inspired by a spiritual call to serve others. A female intuitively replied:

I was sitting out in the cold even though my arthritis was bothering me. It was something in my heart; I knew the people in the neighborhood needed those coats. (A6)

This sense of a personal responsibility to do God’s work was illustrated by another volunteer who stated:

My pastor said that we are here to serve . . . serve one another. I can understand that, but sometimes you have to sacrifice something of yourself to be of service to others. You have to sacrifice something in your personal circle in order to volunteer. (A4)

Another volunteer offers an example of this sense of obligation to participate in volunteering. She talks about feeling guilty in the sense of letting her pastor down:

My pastor stepped up to me and put me on the bereavement ministry to make phone calls. I did not turn him down. I’m figuring I just can’t say no, it is hard for me to say no. So now he is approaching me about reading to the kids. He is making me feel guilty. (A6)

Sometimes, grandmothers can resent the responsibility and inconveniences that are involved in raising a grandchild. Another volunteer expressed:

I did not want to get up and feed those four extra children that I had to raise. I did not feel good about it and they knew it, but it was something that I had to do. (A4)

Another grandmother stated:

I became depressed because I had my grandson since he was 7 days old. (A2)
And finally:

You just kind of did what you needed to do in order to keep your kids where you knew where they were and to keep them active in school and in different programs throughout the community. (A3)

**Social responsibility.** Many people volunteer because they anticipate needing help for themselves in the future or have already received help and want to give something back (Banks, 1997; Bridgebridge & Home, 1996; Freean, 1997, p. 164; Kincade et al., 1996). Overall, grandmothers conveyed that one of the reasons that they continue to give back is because they have received services and support from their organizations. An expression of appreciation for the ways they had been helped or supported in their lives by others was articulated by the grandparents:

I had a very serious health challenge. Oh my Lord, I had two wonderful people visit me from time to time. They heard my cry. They would say that you can come to the program and meet other people. After I got back into full swing, I started visiting the program and got involved in volunteering. It is such a wonderful feeling going out to mentor to people. (A6)

Those grandparents who contributed time to volunteering felt worthy to receive. For some, this was a “reward” they received as part of a mutual exchange that occurred when they were advocating for a cause that they believed in or when helping others. From a different perspective, a volunteer mentioned:

My mom and dad use to send me to the neighbor’s house, their friends, and sick people in the church, and even their kids to wash their feet and manicure their toenails. (A2)
Another volunteer mentioned:

I continue to volunteer because I have to give back to my community the way they have given to me. It is such a wonderful feeling to volunteer because you are giving them just as much as they are giving you. (A3)

A final response from a grandparent:

Being a grandparent, there is a lot that we have to go through. You have to take a stand because sometimes the things we are doing are covered up. So by coming here and getting involved, all of these things are being uncovered so we can help somebody else. It is not all about the money; it is getting the word out about how you can make it. (A2)

Upon reflection, one sentiment that is common for all these grandmothers is the ability to make a difference. Many made their decision about getting involved based on whether their contribution could create a positive change in the lives of others. Most importantly, moral obligation as cultural capital for African Americans is a strong factor, spanning all socioeconomic levels, and is reflected in all the remaining focus group commentaries. Next, is a section that presents the study’s unintended consequences or findings that are not in agreement with the theoretical framework of Wilson and Musick (1997) Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work.

**Unintended Results for Grandmothers in the Trenches.**

In the general volunteer literature, other than not being asked, additional factors that prevented or discouraged volunteer participation by low-income communities were lack of financial resources, lack of child care, lack of transportation, low self-esteem or little confidence in skills, negative perceptions of volunteering or of external volunteer
organizations, and cultural and/or language barriers (Points of Light Foundation (2000, p. 22). The one significant sub-theme that emerged from this focus group session was a willingness to serve. Also a previously unstudied factor mentioned by *Grandmothers in The Trenches* was difficulty in motivating youth to volunteer.

**Willingness to serve.** One’s motivation to engage in volunteering is related to interests and issues that one feels strongly about. Participants said that the receptivity of younger participants to serve as volunteers in the church setting was problematic. The grandmothers expected that youth would continue in their volunteer efforts, which in turn would increase the likelihood they would help others in the future. One grandmother shared:

It is hard to get young people to volunteer. Mostly everybody in my church is younger than I am, but they don’t volunteer as much as the older people who have been doing this for a long time. The pastor will ask the two people who are in their seventies and eighties because younger people don’t volunteer. (A6)

Another noted that interest in volunteering first and foremost needs to start at home:

If they see you doing it [volunteering] and how much you enjoy it, eventually it will rub-off. For example, I had two stepsons that I raised, and over the summer one volunteered to work at the House of Mercy. He said that it was so rewarding. The House of Mercy even gave him a little certificate. My stepson said that this experience was something that he could put on his résumé. If you start early volunteering, I think eventually it will lead children to want to give back a little to the community, even if it’s nothing more than to volunteer to help with basketball or at the recreation center for an hour or two. (A3)
In summary, those characterized by lower social status are not expected to, encouraged or even made aware of how to volunteer in formal organizations. As a result of their limited social and cultural capital, formal volunteering may be alien or not as relevant to the class or culture. Groups mainly accustomed to informal care giving and mutual aid among relatives and friends (Lukka & Ellis, 2001), feel obligated to participate primarily in informal helping activities. Next a discussion of the perceived experiences of the higher socioeconomic status focus group participants is given.

**Getting Down to Business**

The second focus Group B, *Getting Down to Business* were participants raised in an upper-class household where volunteering was a family tradition. Having parent role models exposed these participants to a variety of volunteering experiences that took place both in their community and in broader society. In their adulthood, the participants made a conscientious decision to find volunteer opportunities that they were passionate about. Participants felt it was a moral obligation to help those who were less fortunate. Although these participants possessed human, social and cultural capital, their perceived challenges were in educating nonprofit organizations on how to retain and attract African Americans to formal volunteering. Additionally, they discussed how working collectively to expand their social networks could help facilitate the recruitment of African Americans to formal organizations.

Group B, *Getting Down to Business* was conducted on January 24, 2012, in a classroom at St. John Fisher College, which is a private liberal arts college located in the affluent Rochester suburb of Pittsford, New York. At first glance, the researcher noticed the participants’ professional attire and how they immediately took their seats at the table.
Due to the business nature of this group, the researcher sat at the end of the table to maintain eye contact and to observe body language. Prior to the start of the interview, the participants asked the researcher the following questions: Can we get a copy of the dissertation? And can our responses be global?

The demographic questionnaire showed one organizational genre where our participants volunteered, namely community-based organizations. The community organizations were: African American organizations, education-based organizations and religious organizations. The average volunteer hours per week spent were five hours over a thirty-three year time span for three organizations.

**Human capital.** Again, Wilson and Musick (1997) defined human capital as work relevant skills and material resources within an individual that make him or her valuable in the volunteer labor marketplace. Resources of prospective volunteers that make them attractive to organizations include education, income, employment, experience, skills and physical capacity. Education as a human resource has been a robust predictor of remaining a volunteer over time (Choi, 2003; Harootyan, 1996). The responses that played into human capital include education, income, health, and health.

**Education.** Group B, *Getting Down to Business* volunteers possessed advanced college degrees and higher socioeconomic levels, and were retired from white collar positions. For the education level, these participants had two bachelors, two masters, and two doctorate degrees. The participants described using skills acquired both from their informal and formal experiences. As stated by a female:

The skills I had in the workplace were easily transferrable: for example, writing training programs and grants, and teaching, which are transferrable skills. (B2)
A male remarked:

My engineering background and my love for fixing things and being one of those do-it-yourselfers gave me the skills to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity. (B6)

Another female replied:

I took the Red Cross leadership training program. I also took a course at Dartmouth College to learn how to read financial statements and some other things related to operating a small business. (B1)

A volunteer felt that skills are developed as you use them. She explained:

A lot of the skills come as you use what you have. For instance, I was a debater in high school, which gave me the experience of taking a topic and running it down from A to Z, so that I can understand the nuances. (B1)

Finally, a volunteer stated;

Whether or not I needed to have some formal leadership training, I picked up skills sets. It was all about me making myself as skilled and knowledgeable as possible so that I could be the best in giving back to whatever that passion was. (B2)

By comparison, Group A, Grandmothers in the Trenches participants reported more high school and associate degrees.

**Income.** Closely related to education is income. A comparison of the household income for Group A, Grandmothers in the Trenches fluctuated from under $25,000 to $39,000 and Group B, Getting Down to Business ranged from $75,000 to over $150,000. Although high-income people are asked more often to volunteer, many of the African
American volunteers in this study were looking to offer their unique skills to the community, but found that nonprofits are in need of more finances. A female articulated:

It is frustrating because in our volunteerism we started at the baseline, but this is not really allowed now, especially in these economic times. It is becoming more and more critical that there be some kind of financial remuneration for volunteering. (B2)

By the same token, a male stated:

Very often, I think larger nonprofit boards are looking for less effort, but more financial resources, connections, and sometimes they are looking for a voice back into the community or the constituency that you might represent. It is a continuum of different things that a formal volunteer organization might be looking for. (B4)

Formal organizations often discuss the need to promote diversity; however, when it comes to recruitment of people of color, one of the participants suggested that a person of color must meet two additional criteria to be considered: (1) public recognition and (2) a high-status position. A volunteer echoed:

To participate in formal volunteering you have to bring to the table some public recognition or have a job level in a corporation that is willing to help finance your position. They don’t say it that way, but that is what happens. Unless you bring one of those two things it is difficult to participate in formal volunteering. (B1)

**Time.** Research suggested that those with higher incomes may also have the luxury of leisure time that they can devote to volunteering. However, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2002) data reported the most frequently mentioned barriers to volunteering include lack of time (43.4%), followed by lack of interest (27.1%), and
health problems (14%) (Sundeen et al., 2007). A study by Wilson (2000) documented that high-income people are not likely to devote much time to volunteering because opportunity costs increase as wages rise. In the narratives, one male responded:

I did not have time to volunteer because of my job. However, I always had the urge to do something. I just did not know what. (B6)

**Health.** The health status of Group B ranged from excellent to good across all age groups and educational levels, whereas the majority of the participants for Group A reported their health status as fair. Again, none of Group B participants reported that health deterred them from being engaged in volunteer work.

**Social capital.** As mentioned earlier, social capital refers to the resources that are derived from relationships with other people and organizations including informal and formal social ties (Wilson, 2000). Both informal social resources such as having children (Wilson & Musick, 1997) and formal social resources, such as ties to organizations, (Harootyan, 1996) increase the likelihood that older adults volunteer. More specifically, factors that influence the decision to volunteer can be understood by looking at the social networks of senior African American volunteers. The researcher found an overlapping of informal and formal social connections of the volunteers. In this section, the most commonly reported factors that facilitated being asked to volunteer were (a) family ties, (b) church ties, (c) work ties, and (d) community ties. The majority of the participants had been raised in a culture of helping family and friends, such that volunteering was a way of life.

**Family ties.** As illustrated, a female respondent said:
I was exposed to volunteerism first of all in the home. Actually, one of my first volunteer experiences was volunteering for my father’s medical office. This volunteering [then] translated into my being involved in the church environment where I provided services related to faith-based activities. (B2)

Very similarly, a male identified family members as people who provided needed assistance with activities of family life. He reflected:

I grew up in North Carolina, and volunteering was just something that people did. I think of volunteering as a subset of giving back to those who need a helping hand and those who are less fortunate. I experienced both my mom and dad in different ways giving back quite significantly. Financially, I saw my father taking care of family members, and providing whatever resources needed. Similarly, I saw my mother being a caregiver for relatives that were ill, and some even moving in. There was always someone in my family reaching back to give a helping hand. (B4)

A female asserted:

I am not going to tell you a lot different than what you have already heard because mine started very early when I was at home as a little girl. I can remember my mother going out to take food to somebody who had moved from Pensacola, Florida, or some other place in the South that my family knew. (B1)

One retired volunteer shared that, as a parent, she was actively engaged. She said:

Yes, as number one was speaking, I thought about something I had done. My first volunteer effort was with the Brownies where I worked with young children. The
reason I did this was because I had two daughters, and I wanted to have an impact on children. (B5)

Participants reiterated the importance of their family values that encouraged participation in volunteerism. First hand, these participants observed their parents working with family as well as non-family members to improve and increase resources. Many of these participants grew up with the expectation of helping others because it was what they were taught as children.

**Work ties.** A male participant entered the room and waited patiently for a volunteer to end her story. He shared that as he listened to others speak, his memories were revitalized. He remarked:

My volunteerism does not go as deep as some of the people I have heard. I started volunteering late in life because of work. There were little bits of it along the way, like Little League baseball at the military base, and when I started to work overseas. My wife kind of twisted my arm, and we got involved with working with some orphans in Mexico. These orphanages were usually run by Catholic nuns and they are at the mercy of what people are willing to give which is not a lot. We would informally help out with painting rooms, collecting toys, and giving food away to the orphanages. (B6)

For this socioeconomic group, this one response is surprising because the participant was not exposed to volunteering through family ties. However, his involvement was initiated later in life in a formal work setting. In this case, the volunteering opportunity had to complement the lifestyle of this participant.
As likely the next volunteer described volunteering as being interwoven into all aspects of his life. The male added:

When I was hired at a Fortune 500 company the founder was passionate about giving back to the community. Volunteering for me was very much rooted in home, church, community, and the company that I worked for. It became a big part of who I am. (B4)

**Church ties.** A participant shared that exposure to volunteering happened when she joined a local church. She explained:

I got started volunteering in the church. I had joined a local church, and the minister said that he needed help in fund-raising. I was given one short project to raise funds for pews, and then another project to raise $800,000 dollars for the building fund.

Another female participant who was raised to help and give care found that volunteering would filter into other areas in her life. She described:

Volunteering was such a common thread of lessons in my home growing up that it translated to everything else that I have done. (B2)

**Community ties.** One female’s involvement in the church would filter down in the community, would give access to and participation in formal volunteering. She stated:

People in the community recognized my skills, which eventually led to a project with a nonprofit organization. (B3)

Finally, one volunteer spoke about being in a small town environment and wanting to do something in her community, which led to an opportunity to volunteer. She explained this as follows:
Living in a small town, as a married and stay-at-home mom, I was kind of looking for something to do in my community. There was a person who became a member of Governor Rockefeller’s community outreach committee. At that time, the Governor only had an office in Albany. He was establishing offices across the state. He asked if I would be willing to be a member of the advisory group. I said yes. (B1)

In addition, this participant community connection led to another volunteer opportunity. She said:

Somebody asked me to serve and take a look at why the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) was not an effective organization, why they could not raise more money and get more volunteers, particularly diverse volunteers. (B1)

Individuals frequently find out about volunteering, employment opportunities, training programs, and other resources through a referral. However, connections alone do not lead to effective social capital. Unpredictably, one participant waited to find something of interest and then initiated his own volunteering; however, this technique was not as successful as “being asked”. A male described:

After I retired I wanted to volunteer, but did not have an idea what I wanted to do. I heard on the radio that the Red Cross needed people for Hurricane Katrina [relief]. I said that is it! That is what I will do. I went down to the Red Cross and they said “we will call you”, but I never got the call. I had to make a nuisance of myself to get someone to talk to me. Eventually, I got the opportunity to go to other hurricanes. (B6)
**Social network ties.** Worth noting is that broader social networks might not always help to facilitate connections with other African American volunteers who already participate in formal volunteering. Surprisingly, a volunteer remarked:

I think it was interesting what number six shared about his challenge in trying to participate in the Red Cross Hurricane Katrina. I know the Red Cross very well and if I had known number six I could have been that yentel. I would have said, “I know this guy” in order to help the process along. (B2)

These participants were both a member of the African American community and yet isolated at the same time from the impacts on community. The comments described volunteering at the formal level, which requires more use of intellectual capital (skill sets) than grassroots level volunteering does.

**Cultural capital.** The third dimension of the Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work is cultural capital. Cultural capital entails resources derived from our values, moral preferences, and attitudes that steer our actions toward engaging in good deeds. Wilson and Musick (1997) identified altruistic values, moral orientations, and religious values as resources that comprise cultural capital. As for cultural resources, volunteering is often performed differently from one culture to another. The responses in the study related to cultural capital included moral obligation and social responsibilities.

Turning to cultural resources, volunteering is often performed differently from one culture to another. Historically, African Americans have been forced to heavily rely on each other for help. This has cultivated a strong concern to care for others that are less fortunate. Importantly, informal helping usually carries more obligations and is less recognized as a pathway to formal volunteering. In fact, it has been shown that informal
volunteering participation may encourage participation in formal helping and vice versa (Gallagher 1994; Wilson & Musick 1997).

In terms of this analysis, the majority of participants noted that they made these conscientious decisions to volunteer because of their passion, love and the need to give back. Cultural capital responses identified from participants’ responses to why they continued to volunteer. Clearly their behavior was directly linked to moral obligation, faith, and social concerns.

**Moral obligation.** A volunteer spoke about her relationship with a Christian God and often referred to volunteer activities as an extension of her religious beliefs. She stated:

> Almost anything people have asked me to do, I did. Generally, I said yes to things I was passionate about or related to me being a Christian to support a broader community than myself. (B1)

A male expressed:

> My father took care of them [family members]. It really made an impression on me from my young life right into my adult life. My father was not expecting anything back; it was just what he did. (B4)

**Social responsibility.** Another factor that affects volunteering is whether people perceive a social responsibility to volunteer. Other comments suggested participants learned of the obligation of service at an early age from other family members or through exposure to mentors. Participants gave examples of family volunteering that demonstrated service and the idea that those who have skills or abilities should share them with others. From one volunteer’s standpoint:
Volunteering is a natural extension of the Christian belief that service to others is part of being a Christian. Recalling a conversation with my mother, I would ask why we were taking food to a person that we did not know. My mother replied that it was part of the Christian commitment to help the poor and to volunteer. (B1)

Another volunteer passionately mentioned:

My husband and I are a part of the marriage ministry in our church. I volunteer to make sure our people are served. I want to make sure African American people know what they have, and know what they can do in life. (B5)

A male expressed:

One of the things I saw was on Red Cross disaster relief assignments the need for people to see other people like themselves volunteering. (B6)

To help others is so essential to African Americans that it was symbolically expressed by one female this way:

Volunteering is like breathing. It is just a part of your existence to give back and to help someone. (B2)

The unintended or unexpected theoretical framework of Wilson and Musick (1997) Integrated Theory of Volunteer results from the Getting Down to Business participants are given below.

**Unintended Results of Getting Down to Business**

Although limited in quantity, research on volunteerism shows that people face barriers to volunteer participation. For example, a study by Johnson (2004) reported the most significant barriers among the baby boomer generation as its members approach
retirement are time constraints, lack of promotion of benefits, and inadequate volunteer management (p. 112). One of the most surprising results of this present study is from some in the highest brackets of $75,000 or higher per year who expressed difficulty in trying to provide their service to volunteer organizations.

**Organization.** The first sub-theme presented is organizational leadership and the volunteer relationship.

**Leadership.** The focus group participants reported a concern that some leaders behave as gatekeepers and may not be aware of the barriers they pose to the recruitment of young leaders. Oftentimes, the lack of social capital and community bonds among certain groups that are not part of a larger network can create obstacles to volunteering (Putnam, 2000). A female participant elaborated:

I think this is true in our organizations as well as the majority [white] organizations. We say we want them [teenagers] at the table, we want them involved, but we really don’t want them to upset the apple cart. A prime example was when I was advising a well-qualified young lady who had been hired to shadow a leader for two years. The leader would come into the office every day, but would never share the kind of information that would help this person become a success. The leader would not step down from her position [as Executive Director to mentor]. Eventually, the young lady went to Spellman College and became a senior executive. Somehow, we have to build in this current generation an understanding that you are only here temporarily. (B1)

Another sub-theme of volunteers from this study was the existence of a restrictive environment. Volunteer research noted that organizational structures vary in their ability
to promote volunteer engagement (Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Putnam, 1993; Riley, Kahn & Foner, 1994) and that weak organizational arrangements exists for recruiting and supporting older adults, especially among populations of color and lower socioeconomic status (Estes & Mahakian, 2001; Tang, Morrow-Howell, & Hong, 2007).

**Restrictive Environment.** The organization environment can affect volunteers’ ability to contribute. Penner and Finkelstein (1998) and Wilson and Musick (1999) suggested that people who stop volunteering rarely say they did so because of low job satisfaction. Indeed, they are more likely to say their efforts were unrecognized (Gora & Nemerowicz, 1985), their skills and interests were not properly matched with assignments they were given, or they were not given enough autonomy or freedom to help those they wished to serve (Harris, 1996, Holden, 1997, Perkins, 1987, Wharton, 1991). A female echoed:

One should have the freedom to begin to speak the truth, which we are often not able to do because of the structure already in place with that particular organization. (B2)

In a pitched voice, a male participant further commented:

I think the majority kinds of organizations [formal volunteer organizations] are synonymous with having a job. They have qualifications which are like a job.

(B4)

A female interjected:

That is so they [volunteer organizations] can self-select us out. (B2)

Continuing his thought, he said:
The baseline to serve in majority [white] nonprofits is no longer the reward of giving, whereas volunteering in African American organizations is based on your willingness to serve. (B4)

This general inhibiting phenomenon may be related to the way cultural capital is institutionalized. Widely shared high-status cultural signals, such as formal knowledge and high status credentials, may be used for social and cultural exclusion (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). This perspective highlighted the exclusionary character of cultural capital where social and cultural elites often serve as gatekeepers who restrict participation of non-elites because of the latter’s lack of cultural capital (Kingston, 2001). This participant suggested:

The development of a stand-alone organization would allow them [African American volunteers] to develop, nurture and cultivate and identify our own [volunteer replacements] for those of us who have aged or are aging out. (B2)

More worrying is the individually posed barrier identified to effectiveness in formal volunteer organizations: a fear to ask questions. Bhasin (1997) suggested that a lack of black, minority and ethnic groups’ presence in mainstream volunteer organizations can create “not for me” perceptions. This lack of visibility serves to further exclude black, minority and ethnic groups from the formal voluntary sector. The vision of mainstream organization is such that black, minorities and ethnic individuals feel that their concerns will not be addressed.

**Fear to ask questions.** The formal structure of some organizations can make volunteers feel uncomfortable about asking questions. A participant who is known for asking questions stated:
There is a fear to ask questions. Sometimes, I am not asked to attend certain board meetings because they know I will ask questions. If questions need to be asked then they [the board] will send me to the meeting. If I don’t understand something and I think there needs to be a broader construct, I say I am not quite sure that I understood a particular word used. I don’t use that word on a regular basis. Lots of times, I ask questions because I know the rest of the people around the table do not understand either. (B1)

Another barrier mentioned is effectiveness. That is, as people age, they may be more reluctant to become involved in poorly managed volunteer programs (Hendricks & Cutler, 2004; Smith, 2004), and some organizations may be reluctant to invest in requisite training or recognition (Warburton, Oppenheimer, & Zappala, 2004).

**Effectiveness.** Group B participants pointed out that the effectiveness of an organization is essential for them to develop an affiliation to it. Another major reason discovered by this study about participants who quit their volunteer work is perceived inability to help as much as they thought they could. One female participant stated:

I had to resign from both [majority and non-majority] types of organizations because I did not bring what they wanted to the table. I don’t want to just be there. It has to be an effective organization, or I will go someplace else. (B1)

The next sub-theme was suggested by a participant to assist African Americans with access and effective participation in formal volunteering.

**Strategy.** Although not addressed by Wilson and Musick (1997) these six participants mentioned that to be engaged in formal volunteering at certain levels strategic planning is essential. A volunteer observed:
It takes strategy whether it is black or white, to be engaged at certain levels at any organization, if you want to be a player. (B1)

How to go about using strategy is illustrated in the next commentary. She elaborated:

My husband was recruited by a black assistant director for the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) board because they had a need for blacks with a musical background. During his term, it was decided that board members should give $20,000 or $30,000. My husband did not have the money. He suggested if a board member could not raise it. The board said, “well, we never done it that way.” So part of what we have to do is train our younger people how to use strategy to handle situations and arguments to counteract some of the negative stuff. (B1)

In the comment the word “strategy” means to develop a plan to offset some of the negative factors that African American volunteers may encounter in formal volunteering. For example, some African American volunteers found that going along with the status quo, just to be there on the board doesn’t make them feel effective. Another female mentioned:

Too many times we have organizations say, “Look we cannot find you; nobody wants to volunteer.” Really, it becomes incumbent upon us to refute and rebuke those statements. I find that in everything I do it is my absolute mission to make sure that an organization has as much diversity as possible. (B2)

The next narrative describes how a participant informed a formal organization of the importance of having a diverse board. She shared:
I remember giving a speech at the Chamber of Commerce. I told them that you all have done some wonderful things; however, until we have people of color on the boards [paid boards] in this community you really have not done anything. We [people of color] ought to be a part of ownership. We have to figure out what to do? (B1)

With a sense of humor in his voice, a male suggested:

You need a special handshake. (B6)

A major organizational barrier discussed in some depth was trust and transparency. Volunteering recruitment is intra-racial, that is, people tend to approach and recruit people like themselves. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) reported that 96% of requests for political volunteers made to whites come from other whites and 61% of the requests to blacks come from other blacks. Other studies also suggested that more homogenous groups are more likely to volunteer because people trust others like themselves. Trust is important because people feel more comfortable volunteering if they think that others will expend as much effort as they will, that they will not have to do more than their share (Musick & Wilson, 2008).

**Trust and transparency.** The storyline reported by the participants indicated how differences in trust and transparency may be perceived respectively in majority (white) and non-majority (African American) dominated organizations. A female participant observed:

Some of the things that you are discussing suggest that there are differences in volunteering for non-African American versus those that are African American organizations. You said that you have to be at a certain level in order to really
make a difference or see what is actually going on in a non-African American organization. In an African American organization, this is not true. There is not the deception that would be found in non-African American organizations. Do you understand what I am talking about? For example, in a white organization you may not have our [African American] people involved at the different levels like president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer like you said. Therefore, you do not get a chance to see things exposed at the different levels. In African American organizations you can, where in the white organization you may not. It is good to know because it will make people aware that there is a difference and what to expect when they volunteer for organizations. (B5)

A female responded:

You make a good point about the different experiences in volunteering for a black versus a white volunteer organization. I believe that most of us around the table are involved with both. I clearly hear what you are saying about the distinction between the two. It certainly is a huge difference in my association with my sorority, and African American associations versus non-minority organizations. (B2)

From a different perspective a male indicated:

I have a further comment. The two organizations are not that much different. What you have is you are among people like yourself and therefore you are much more comfortable. Let’s take the non-African American organizations that tend to bring people on board like themselves. You say how did that person get there and I did not. I am better qualified? It is because they are more comfortable with
them. We also do the same thing. If I went to the other [African American] organization all I would need to do is show up at the door and put my hand up and I am gone. However, if you bring somebody from the outside that is a little different we might not be as comfortable with them. I am not trying to say that it is fair, but we [African Americans] do tend to migrate to people we are more comfortable with. (B6)

To get around the perceived issue of trust and transparency in formal volunteer organizations, one female suggested:

Make friends at high levels so that you will be given the opportunity for volunteer leadership positions. Sometimes, you really have to put skin in the game to gain position to prove yourself and become part of the organization as a trusted and results-driven individual. (B2)

The term “skin in the game” was used to describe a person’s contribution to diversity of the process by showing others [the board] that you can be influential and have some credibility to nominate persons. She further explained:

As contributors to organizations you have to put up or shut up. I emailed an African American volunteer to inquiry why the women that are nominated for the Women’s Council Athena awards are all white? and why was there no diversity? The African American volunteer said, “I need you to help me identify other candidates.” I ended up working very hard at the organization to nominate a diverse pool of candidates that cut across all definitions of inclusion, diversity economics, and professions. (B2)
Another strategy mentioned was mentorship. Once again, older African Americans perceived that a way to increase African American participation in formal volunteering is to provide mentoring to newer, diverse volunteers.

Mentorship. Volunteers communicated that they had offered to provide support to younger volunteers who had risen to the top of an organization; however, there was little response to their request. The experienced volunteers enjoyed volunteering and viewed providing support to other emerging volunteers as an essential exchange because they could help them (volunteers) to navigate through the process. As noted:

We had a wonderful idea about providing mentorship to people who have risen to the top of certain organizations. Those of us who have had previous experiences would come together and offer them our support, for example, if they wanted to call to yell and scream or to do some brainstorming with us. We got very little response. Sometimes, there is not receptivity among people who get to a certain position because they think that they got there by themselves. They don’t understand that there were a lot of steps to get them there. I don’t know what we can do about it, but I do think that something has to be done because you can put yourself out there but if people are not receptive it is not going to work. (B1)

Continuing on, this same volunteer talked about how she became involved with the Visiting Nurse Service board. She explained:

It was because an African American board member offered to provide mentorship. She was a nurse who was leaving the board and wanted me be her replacement. (B1)

A male echoed:
Make it a requirement for those people who have risen to the top of certain organizations to have a volunteering coach. In addition, their success will depend on their ability to reach back. (B6)

Some participants felt that their ministers should provide guidance in helping them to provide support to others. A male articulated:

I think we have always been amazing at helping each other. However, we forget to put in a word, recommend, or connect with each other. It is so easy to do, but sometimes we forget about our networks and connections. We all need to be reminded of this. I think one of the great places to do this is in the church. I think our ministers could do a more effective job in teaching us about the things in life that can help our community. (B4)

A female commented:

Do they know? I have been frustrated for a number of years with the church. I think that we would get more out them [Pastors] if we demanded more from them. You are the Pastor if you can’t provide it [teachings about life] then find someone who can. (B1)

This same male gave this perspective:

One thing I have learned to come to appreciate in life is that it only takes one voice to really make a difference. I mean you can have a church of five people, but if you can get one person to carry the message that can really make a difference, one voice is very, very powerful. (B4)

A final comment made:
We [African American volunteers] have not had one voice in a very long time. (B2)

Furthermore, if one has a desire to recruit African American volunteers in the future, a discussion about barriers is essential. This concern emerged from Group B focus group.

Youth. Participants voiced the need to engage youth in volunteering for future sustainability and recruitment. One discouraged volunteer stated:

I have had many young people tell me they don’t feel wanted. They tell me that organizations say they want you, they do not really want me. I often advocate for students, but most organizations that serve a younger demographic do not have young people on their boards. The only board that has a student representative who can report out and make decisions at the board level is the City School District Board. Fundamentally, I believe that it comes down to they [organizations] do not want high school students. (B2)

A volunteer bellowed:

I think it is because nonprofit are looking for people with financial resources. (B3)

Another female participant concurred:

One of the things I think those of us who are working with young people can do is to try to help them develop more leadership skills. You know it did not matter to me when I went to a table [board meeting] if they wanted me or not. I felt like I needed to be there. (B1)

She further stated:
About fifteen years ago, we did a youth conference with the Rochester City School District. We talked about things to consider when applying for a personal business loan. One thing we can do is help them [young adults] to look at themselves as not just as volunteers, but as board members. (B1)

Another female added:

Developing an organizational structure to nurture and cultivate our own [African Americans] is needed in order to have ownership of volunteer roles and recruitment. (B2)

The importance of having future generations of African Americans to recruit was further expressed:

I think if we had something that we had ownership over, some of that [development of leadership skills] could be implemented. One of my regrets in retiring was not being able to identify and cultivate my replacement. Those of us [African Americans] who have aged out of those corporate positions were replaced by whites. I was replaced by a white man. I knew that I would not be replaced by a person of color, and that has happened to each one of us. Especially in these economic times, everyone is fighting for these [corporate] positions because money is associated with them. I was in charge of charitable giving, and it is my deepest sadness that I was not able to have the foresight to really make sure that I had someone prepared to recommend. I spoke too many of our colleagues who have similar regrets. We were all busy serving and helping other organizations who have benefited from our contacts. Sadly, we forgot about our own. (B2)
**Volunteer.** The confidence level of prospective volunteers and its impact on their levels of involvement were the next unexpected result. The results suggested that negative attitudes of volunteers toward themselves or perceptions about their eligibility or qualifications for volunteering may well be important factors to consider in recruiting African Americans for volunteer work.

**Confidence level.** When looking at the individual who volunteers, some participants mentioned that existing volunteers do not make new volunteers feel welcomed. There is an inequality within human, social, and cultural capital between the race and ethnicity of volunteers, and this has an impact on respective levels of involvement. Some African Americans are faced with more constraints and barriers to volunteering than other African Americans, and less means to overcome them, including for instance wealth, level of education, and volunteer experience between individuals and communities.

Alternatively, in prior attempts to volunteer with an organization, with lower status characteristics persons may have had negative experiences that served to reduce their level of interest. Often, they may have sensed a class or cultural bias from the behavior and attitudes of those who control the organizations, thus diminishing their willingness to participate in such a milieu. A participant connected this loss of confidence with the volunteer experience of feeling devalued. Another respondent presented her own perspective by saying:

I have talked to parents about volunteering in the schools with their children, but because they have had a bad experience with the school administration they are scared, they are insecure and they don’t feel that they have anything to bring to
the table. I feel that this is a level of confidence because if they read a story, or share with a child what they know about the world, their presence would really help these children. (B1)

One final barrier reported by African American participants was lack of recognition. It seems clear that a lack of understanding why individuals volunteer could deter recruitment and participation. Willingness to volunteer cannot be separated from the motives, values, and beliefs of the volunteer (Wilson, 2000). Two variables that served as central motivations for willingness to volunteer were egoism and altruism. An egoistic motive is a desire to improve one’s own well-being and quality of life, and altruistic motive is a desire to improve the well-being of others (Canaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Unger, 1991). Given that the altruistic desire to help others was frequently found in many studies, this may be one of the most important factors to motivate older adults to volunteer (Barlow & Hainsworth, 2001; Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Larkin, Sadler, & Mahler, 2005; Nelson et al., 2004; Okun, 1994; Warburton, Terry, Rosenman, & Shapiro, 2001).

**Recognition.** It is difficult to disentangle whether people’s motivations for helping are altruistic, such as a concern for others or an egoistic, involving a concern for themselves. A female mentioned:

Some African American volunteers are looking for accolades and acceptance, but if they can build inside themselves a spiritual level or a religious belief that can feed [satisfy] them enough, then accolades from other members of the board will not be needed. (B1)
The final focus group further illustrated how those who possess significant human capital and are in higher status categories are often expected and encouraged to volunteer in formal organizations through various pathways. These pathways showed that employers expected them to be involved in corporate social responsibility activities and community service groups, as well as familial responsibilities such as youth sports or other social engagement. Krause (2000) cited many people are brought into formal volunteering through clubs, churches, or other organizations of which they are members. Thus joiners are more likely to become volunteers.

Setting the Record Straight

The final focus Group C, Setting the Record Straight were successful leaders actively engaged in formal volunteering to champion a cause and to make a difference. The participants felt that exposure and involvement in formal volunteering gave them the opportunity to educate broader society and to dispel the statistics that portray African American as non-contributors. Some participants shared that the pathway to formal volunteering is contingent upon people that know you and people who are in your circle of influence. In terms of majority (white) organizations, they are limited in who they know, which perpetuates homogenous groups.

Group C, Setting the Record Straight was conducted on March 6, 2012, in a meeting room at a local branch library, located in Rochester, New York. As the group assembled themselves around the table, they were given paperwork to complete. The body language and facial expressions of the participants displayed that the demographic survey felt they were under scrutiny.
The demographic questionnaire revealed one organizational genre where participants volunteered, namely nonprofit boards and community-based organizations. These community-based organizations were fraternities’ and sororities’ organizations, and nonprofit boards. The average volunteer hours per week spent were five hours over a twenty-five year timespan for four organizations.

**Human capital.** Furthermore, Wilson and Musick (1997) defined human capital as work relevant skills and materials resources residing within an individual that make him or her valuable in the volunteer labor marketplace. Resources of prospective volunteers that make them attractive to organization include education, income, employment, experience, skills and physical capacity. Education as a human resource has been a robust predictor of being a volunteer over time (Choi, 2003; Harootyan, 1996). The responses that played into human capital include education, health, age and health.

**Education.** For the education level, Group B, *Getting Down to Business* participants had two bachelors, two masters, and two doctorate degrees, whereas Group C, *Setting the Record Straight* had three bachelors, three masters and one doctorate degree. Participants described using skills acquired both from their informal and formal experiences. She stated:

> Working at the Department of Social Service for 27 years, I learned how to work with people of all nationalities, all different income levels. I also know how to talk to them; I can make referrals because I know people, and can relate to anyone in any condition. And “condition” is the word because people are in all kinds of conditions these days. They want to feel good about themselves and they want a little bit of help. (C4)
A female commented:

In my case, volunteering is life learned. It came from educational pursuits, from family experiences, the church, social outings, interacting among people majority of people and minority groups. (C1)

Likewise, another volunteer shared:

As a department director I used people and organization skills. I did not have to learn any new skills when I volunteered as Vice President for the Northeast Community Block Club. (C2)

The last comment made:

I really think there is a cross-functional preparation in learning. You bring some of what you know from your education, training, and what you learn from work into the volunteer opportunity. (C7)

**Income.** The income levels were not significantly different. Compared to Group B’s $75,000 to over $150,000, Group C, *Setting the Record Straight*, earned $40,000 to $150,000. Participants in the group felt that income inequalities should be considered for why there is less participation of African Americans in formal volunteer organizations. One woman explained:

When they [researchers] do the surveys and write the data analysis, I do not know if they do socioeconomic cuts. Do you know if they [researchers] take or compare African Americans with Caucasians within a certain socio-economic group? In this country, nobody wants to talk about the fact that a large percent of our people [African Americans] are living in poverty. For instance, when you start comparing how much volunteering...volunteering to us [African Americans] is
someone taking care of the kids while someone goes to work so that we can have food. Even this survey has some questions on socioeconomic levels. We might volunteer as much as the next person who is living in poverty. So how can you just compare us to the general population without taking that [economic piece] into consideration? I think that the economic piece has a huge impact on the participation of African Americans in formal volunteering. (C7)

**Health.** Yet again, none of the participants reported that health deterred them from being engaged in volunteer work.

**Time.** In terms of time, the perception of having less and less time is a growing malady affecting the work world, family life and, of course, volunteering. However, research suggests that those who work part-time volunteer more than those who are not employed. In contrast, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005) found that although part-time workers might be the most likely to volunteer at the highest rate, they do not necessarily contribute the most hours, which are donated by people with the most time. A male volunteer stated:

Some people have asked me to volunteer on boards, but I had to turn them down because I was working as a physical therapist for the disabled and did not have the time. (C5)

He further remarked:

A year ago, I was an organizer for my block club. We were all too busy, and eventually it failed. We started it again shortly before my retiring. Since my retirement, I have more time, and this is what is making it somewhat successful. (C5)
Upon reflection, this group chose where and the amount of time to devote to formal volunteering. In most cases, the participants prioritized what volunteer activities were of value during their particular stage in life. For instance, one of the participants stated that volunteering would need to be delayed and resumed closer to retirement. The decision to volunteer was not strained by unanticipated family roles, such as in Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches* who were raising their grandchildren.

**Social capital.** Aforementioned, social capital refers to the resources that are derived from relationships with other people and organizations including informal and formal social ties (Wilson, 2000). Both informal social resources, such as having children (Wilson & Musick, 1997), and formal social resources, such as ties to organizations (Harootyan, 1996), increase the likelihood that older adults volunteer. More specifically, factors that influenced the decision to volunteer can be understood by looking at the social networks of senior African American volunteers. With respect to social relations, the dissertation study investigated the relationships that provide access and participation to formal volunteer organizations. Again, the researcher found an overlapping of informal and formal social connections of the volunteers. Throughout the focus groups, participants commented on factors that facilitated being asked to volunteer. The most common were: (a) organization ties, (b) social network ties, (c) community ties, and (d) work ties.

**Organization ties.** The established relationships people have with various institutions, as well as the extent to which people personally know other people within a range of institutional settings, can help to facilitate volunteer participation. A volunteer described:
A professor that was a good friend of mine at Monroe Community College exposed me to volunteering for an executive board for a nonprofit childhood development center. Also I was recruited to the American Diabetes Association and the reason for that was the Director an African American was looking to populate her advisory council with African Americans and Latino Americans. Also, as an alumnus of the African American Leadership Development Program, I continuously receive requests to consider joining nonprofit boards. (C1)

A participant mentioned how being involved in a certain type of organization increased his visibility. He recalled:

I forgot to mention that I use to be on the Martin Luther King commission for a number of years. However, I am no longer on that committee, but because of my years of involvement people know me. (C5)

Another male participant echoed:

A colleague and I were charter members of the Rochester Monroe County Freedom Trail Commission and that came as a consequence of me approaching them about how this part of our community legacy, especially African American role was being neglected. I let them [Freedom Trail Commission] know that this was cutting the community short on resources. (C3)

From a different perspective, a volunteer described how a college internship with an organization gave her experience to be a senior counselor for a day camp and this inspire her to use these skills in volunteering. She recalled:

I did an internship at Eastside Community Center in my senior year of college. I was hired when someone wrote a proposal for organizers and coordinators. I
learned that I could work well with people and make them feel that they can contribute. So this set the pattern for me to start volunteering to organize block clubs and coalitions. (C4)

Finally, another volunteer put it this way:

I have been recruited because somebody knows me. Somebody has been with me on some [other] board or in some other volunteer capacity. (C7)

Volunteers who found a pathway to engage in one organization are frequently recruited by other organizations, which creates an over saturation of being asked. In contrast, new volunteers are targeted only if they have been referred or directly asked by someone who can endorse their qualifications.

A concerned volunteer mentioned that there was a need to help organizations with broadening their recruitment efforts to decrease using the same volunteers. She shared:

If nonprofits are dominated by people who are not of color then they are limited in terms of who they know. What happens is we tend to use the same people over and over because we are comfortable with them and we know them. So what they do is over work those of us who are willing to volunteer and who they know. One way I have handled being over saturated with requests; especially now that I entering retirement, is to look for the next generation to connect them with the organization. Now the other problem with that is usually they [organizations] want me. So getting them to understand that there are other people who bring more to the board is important. (C7)
Social network ties. Individuals who are board members of several organizations often serve as individuals who foster social capital between people and organizations. A volunteer made this point when he said:

Somewhere gave a group of people my name to be involved with kids’ sports throughout Monroe County. My exposure to volunteerism has been because of the various contacts I have, whether they have been through other community groups, or through state or national recommendations. (D6)

Passionately, he further stated:

If I got a brain in my head and can articulate myself around people they are going to remember me as one that can be a part of volunteering. For example, I do not have anything to do with cancer, but I know people who have it. So why I am being asked can you volunteer for your block to collect funds? Autism, I know just as much as anybody else does. Again, why I am being asked to participate? It is because of exposure! I don’t think it is so much that whites are volunteering more or we can’t find African Americans or whatever flavor [excuse] you want to put on it. I think again, it is a matter of exposure as someone would say it is who you really know and who really knows you. (C6)

Community ties. Community ties refer to the instances when individuals develop the common recognition of shared interest, culture, and potential for trust envisioned as the basis for social capital and mutual action. As one participant talked about his evolution to volunteer work, he spoke directly of his personal exposure to human and social problems:
In Rochester, I experienced some discrimination. I listened long enough to people who were in the area, and, as a consequence, I started volunteering for things going on in the community. (C3)

Another participant talked about how his community ties were not based on getting access to services, but on serving those who were less fortunate. As stated by a senior male volunteer:

I would volunteer as a Yoga teacher at Baobab Cultural Center, which had not had a Yoga program. It was something that I loved to do. I knew it could help particularly people of color, especially in this day and age when there are a lot of health issues. (C5)

**Work ties.** An individual’s work ties can generate social capital in three broad ways. First is the job, which is a place where people meet and develop trusting relationships based on mutual assistance. Oftentimes, these formed relationships with work colleagues are used to recruit others to give time to a good cause outside of the work environment. Several participants mentioned that their work ties provided them with a present recognition, meaning that they were easily identified as potential and attractive volunteers to recruit for nonprofit organizations. One volunteer summed it up:

I have been solicited to serve on boards by people that I work with and who live in the same area that I live in, and those who know that boards need people. (C4)

A volunteer shared how work ties with ex-employees [retirees] led to his volunteer participation after retirement. He recalled:

It was not hard to become involved with Habitat for Humanity. Former workers, I supervised were volunteering at Habitat for Humanity. These guys knew what
kinds of skills I had and recommended me to the organization. When I retired the
organization had an opportunity for me. (C6)

A female added:

When I was employed at the American Red Cross, I participated in the African
American Leadership program at the United Way. This experience gave me an
opportunity to volunteer on the Freddie Thomas board. (C2)

A female participant shared:

When I came to this community people were asking me to volunteer because of
my job. I noticed that when I volunteered I would be the only one [African
American] or two people in the room. I got involved with developing a broader
database for the United Ways’ African American Leadership Development
program to get more people quote on quote prepared to volunteer. One of my
frustrations is I still do not think that we have done a good enough job of utilizing
people who have gone through the program. (C7)

Cultural capital. Yet again, the third dimension of Integrated Theory of
Volunteer Work is cultural capital, which capital entails resources derived from our
values, moral preferences, and attitudes that steer our actions toward engaging in good
deeds. Wilson and Musick (1997) identified altruistic values, moral orientations, and
religious values as resources that comprise cultural capital. As for cultural resources,
volunteering is often performed differently from one culture to another. A culture, on the
other hand, influences our lives and requires members to adapt to changes. The responses
here that comprise cultural capital included moral obligation and social responsibility.
Volunteers described feeling personally obligated “to do the right thing”, which in this
study means doing volunteer work, both informal and formal. For some, this obligation stemmed from what they observe as their civic responsibility in the community, and to personal commitment to charity and service.

*Moral obligation.* For instance, a volunteer described this sense of obligation:

> Before I leave any group or board that I belong to, I always mentor someone else whose is coming on board, who is considering coming on board, and who is talking about getting more active in the community. I want that individual to be in a position to do the same [as I have done]. That way, I have given back. (C1)

In a similar vein, a volunteer explained:

> One of the nice things about bringing them [volunteers] board on while you are still there is you can mentor them in the role until they get more comfortable. Also, they can call you up and talk to you offline and say, “I started to say this, but I was not quite sure”, or” what do you think about this; I’d like to propose this.” Believe me, it work both ways. (C7)

The next commentary illustrates a belief and social responsibility. As quoted:

> I always felt that everyone deserves an education. As a teacher I saw that children don’t operate or live in a vacuum you got to address the whole family issue. This is what led me to the job that I retired from. I worked with young adults and families who were in a crisis and live in poverty. Helping individuals who were unemployed, in foster care, or dealing with the government system is the type of volunteering I wanted to do. (C2)

*Social responsibility.* In volunteer research, helping out neighbors is considered to be an informal volunteer activity. However, an individual’s neighborhood and neighbors
are links to an individual’s community, and thus an indicator of the individual’s connectedness to the place where he or she resides. A volunteer made this point when he said:

I needed to feel a part of the community, and the only way to make a community work was to organize the neighborhood so that neighbors know each other. (C5)

In another case, an earlier exposure and involvement led to a long-term commitment. A male talked about how his ethical duty encouraged volunteering. He remarked:

Reaching out to address a problem has frequently led to my being drafted to volunteer to resolve the problem. Although I had many failures, one exception was the Hispanic Leadership Development program: I had not studied Spanish or anything of that nature, but it seemed like it was addressing an issue that I thought was important, so I went with that down through the years. (C3)

The final discussion of unintended results for Setting the Record Straight focus group will be presented.

**Unintended Result of Setting the Record Straight**

This section discusses the unintended results of the *Setting the Record Straight* group. The unintended results included organization and volunteering.

**Organization.** Again, the organization is mentioned as being a barrier to formal participation of African Americans. A participant pointed out that the effectiveness of an organization is essential for him to develop an affiliation to it. A male volunteer stated:

Recently, I dropped out of two committees. I don’t know, but maybe the committee was too big, or I had not found my place in it. Even if the committee is
doing great work, for me to feel good about what I am doing, the organization has to be relevant for the time and effective. (C5)

**Volunteer.** The *Setting the Record Straight* focus group discussed the subthemes of gratification, social acceptance/trust, sense of need, and having the disease (not saying no).

**Gratification.** This sub theme was described by participants who were satisfied with being a part of an organization where they could make a difference. As stated by a volunteer:

I found out from other volunteers that a lot of people want immediate gratification. They want to see that what they do is helping. For example, one of our programs helped people get a job. Our volunteers would love to help people with their résumés and interviewing skills because when someone got a job they would thank the volunteer. The volunteer would be so happy about it. (C2)

This feeling of being appreciated was further illustrated when a participant described how his took time away from his vacation to fly down to New Orleans for Mardi Gras and work in the 9th ward with his church to build houses. He said:

I was very pleased that I made a contribution. I did not have to be the big cheese. The end game to it all was to hear my pastor stand up and say “Mr. Dedicated” did not have to take time away from his vacation, but he did. (C6)

Similar, to *Getting Down to Business*, this group mentioned the importance of social acceptance and trust between members of formal volunteering organizations.

**Social acceptance/trust.** Bonding and building of relationships with others is reciprocal, especially at the grassroots level. A neighborhood organizer explained:
The most important thing I found is that a person must be able to trust you and believe that you care about them. Once I help a person with their problem, they feel good enough to want to help their neighbor or someone else. This way, volunteerism becomes a sustainable endeavor. (C4)

The next barrier dealt with youth volunteers and the need to encourage them to volunteer. Interestingly, research cited by Sundeen and Raskoff (2003) on obstacles to volunteering among teenagers showed that social status and role influence the various reasons young persons give for not volunteering. Primarily, volunteering is regarded by young people as something that older people do. Interestingly, Gaskin (1998) noted that this is partly because young people perceive that the main activities of volunteers working for charities and voluntary organizations, raising money for causes and helping in the neighborhood. These are not activities with which young people generally associate themselves.

**Sense of need.** Similar to willingness to serve, Group C participants felt that young people were lacking a sense of need to respond to others. There is difficulty with instilling the passion in younger people to volunteer for the right reasons. They should volunteer to genuinely help out others, not because they are required to do so. A concerned female from Group C, Setting the Record Straight elaborated:

Who is going to take over when those around this table decide to stop volunteering? I don’t think there is a sense of need amongst the young folks. One of the ways I think that we can get, them especially minority young adults and professionals, to volunteer is to get them to understand that there is a real substance to volunteering. I learned that a kid can go through high school and
college and never think about volunteering because volunteering for a lot of people means that you do not get paid. They have been taught to finish high school, go on to college to get the job that pays good money so that you can live the good life. We have to let them know that there is more to life than making money and having a nice car, having a nice home, and having an education. I know that some of that can come from school and college, but I think it might be too late to recruit them by that time. I do not have the answer, but I do know from my own experience that some of it has to come from home. I think they have to start early and have it [volunteering] in their mind before they go on to that grand thing called college. (C2)

Studies showed that familial influence (by volunteering with parents or other means) increases volunteering in children (Janoski & Wilson, 1995). This same volunteer lamented:

What about the youth who have not been introduced to volunteering by family members or through school experiences? How do we encourage the passion and a consciousness of how volunteering can have an impact? (C2)

Nodding in agreement, others commented:

I think what you are saying about the rationale is helping them to understand they are building life skills and work skills. In fact, people sometimes end up with jobs as a result of having volunteered. (C7)

Wilson (2000) suggested that pro-volunteer attitudes on dispositions may be related to early experiences including participation in volunteer activities as a youth and having parents who promoted volunteerism and helping others. Hodgkinson and
Weitzman (1994) also cited the importance of experiences earlier in life reporting higher than average rates of volunteering among those who had previously volunteered and those who had seen someone they admired become a volunteer. As one female suggested:

I would start at age three. Yes. My children always want me to babysit, so I am stuck with the kids and they do what I do. For example, I had to go to a meeting at a business association, so I took the baby to the meeting. The first thing she said was “Good morning, everybody”. She is going to be a good volunteer. She was well-mannered through the whole meeting and no crying. It starts with family and mentoring people that I work with on a regular basis to become volunteers. Anyone can be a volunteer; anyone has something to give to someone else. (C4)

However, an unforeseen sub-theme “having the disease” was a term used to describe a person who cannot say no to volunteering solicitations.

**Having the disease (not saying no).** A majority of the participants were veteran volunteers who are faced with “how to say no” when they have been referred by someone they respect, and how to prepare boards for their resignation. A male admitted:

A friend of mine gave you my name, and when you called, what did I say? “Where will it be? and what time?” What I am saying is it is difficult for me to say no, when I really should say “no”. (C6)

Similarly, a female participant responded:

I absolutely have to agree with number six. One of my biggest problems is the lack of or the inability to say “no”. If you have that disease that he and I have, you do have to try and get better at saying “no”. Recently, I have gotten better at saying “no”, but it is a really big challenge because I like being able to make a difference and a contribution. (C7)
Finally, a volunteer who felt that she had done enough volunteering stated:

I don’t have the disease any longer because I learned how to say ‘no”. Over the years, you just learn how to say no because you can become overwhelmed. You just say no. “Thank you, but no”. (C1)

It would seem that senior volunteers at some point decided that volunteerism must be left to younger persons. In contrast, some people did not want to volunteer because of the term-commitment. Many older people, particularly adults age 55 years and older, are looking for a flexible balanced retirement and may not want to be tied down to a routine (Smith, 2004; Warburton, Terry, Rosenman, & Shapiro, 2011). Foot (2001) outlined in his popular *Boom, Bust, and echo: Profiting from the demographics Shift in the 21st century* that today’s older adults are likely to say “I’ve done my time”, and “I’ve volunteered all my life; now’s the time for me.” The traditional work done by long-term volunteers is simply not attractive to today’s episodic volunteers. People who are currently in their 20s to 40s make up, proportionally, the largest potential pool of volunteer labor in the near future. The consensus is that the “Generation Xers” and their slightly older and slightly younger peers will not have the same long-term loyalty to organizations that their parents had. Their paid work experience will be dominated by sequential employment characterized by short-term positions with a series of employers across a range of professions and careers. Long-term loyalty to an employer (and including “nonpaying employers”) will be foreign to most of them.

**Summary of Focus Groups**

The section provides a summary of the differences in the demographic profiles and dynamics of the three focus groups’ participants.
First, Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches*, which consisted of seven participants (all female grandparents), was called upon unexpectedly to parent a second time around. The term “skip generation” is a term used to describe two or more generations younger than the caregivers. It is one of the greatest phenomena of our times: grandparent-headed families taking care of their grandchildren, or even their great-grandchildren, in lieu of the absent parents.

Nationally, every year, more and more grandparents of all ages and from all ethnic-and socio-economic groups are becoming primary caregivers for their grandchildren. According to the American Association of Retired Persons, 49 million children (7%) under age 18 live in a grandparent-headed household. Approximately one-fifth of these children have neither parent present, and grandparents are responsible for their basic needs. There are several reasons why this increase has occurred; drug addiction, incarceration, mental health issues, child abuse, military service, and abandonment are among the more common causes. Consistently, some participants in this study found an engagement in volunteerism that was formed due to a family crisis where neither parent was capable of caring for his or her children. Raising a second family was not part of the plan, but these grandmothers assumed the role of the parents to keep their grandchildren within the family, to prevent them from going into a foster care system, and to make whatever sacrifices were necessary to keep them from further developmental harm.

The majority of this study’s Group A, grandparents lived on a fixed income, below the poverty rate. As described by Payne (2005), “Poverty is the extent to which an individual goes without resources. These resources include: financial, emotional, mental,
spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships, role models, and knowledge of hidden rules” (p.8). According to the U.S. Census 2010, the federal government considers a family of four with annual earnings of less than $22,314 to qualify as “poor”. However, the average per capita income for the City of Rochester, New York was $15,588. About 23.4% of families and 25.9% of the population were below the poverty line, including 37.5% of those under age 18 and 15.4% of those ages 65 or over (U.S Census, 2010).

Unfortunately, raising grandchildren causes financial, physical, mental and emotional challenges. The Rochester participants expressed feeling overwhelmed, with guilt and resentment toward their adult children for creating this dilemma. One grandmother confided:

It is a learning experience at age 65 trying to raise a one-year-old all over again. It is not like getting him at age 3, 4, 5, 10, or 12. When I first got him, I was overwhelmed and amazed. I said, “Please don’t leave me here with this little boy”. (A5)

Eventually, the grandparents found through word of mouth a formal volunteer organization that provided support and resources to help them with this increasingly common family (grandfamilies) to be healthy and successful. As mentioned by a volunteer:

It all boils down to support. Our resources are a wealth, and it really makes a difference. We are empowered by doctors, psychologists who taught us what to look for when we go into the homes to mentor. This program empowers us to go and empower some else. (A5)
This focus Group A differs significantly from Group B, *Getting Down to Business* and Group C, *Setting the Record Straight* because the Group A grandparents started as recipients of the services provided by the social service program, and only gradually became volunteers and role models for their peers. Both Group B *Getting Down To Business*, and Group C, *Setting the Record Straight*, participants made a conscientious decision to volunteer, unlike Group A. Second, Group B, *Getting Down To Business* consisted of six participants (2 males, 4 females) who were upper class and highly regarded African American volunteers in the Rochester community. The participants’ first exposure to volunteering began in the home as a family tradition to help those who are less fortunate. Unanimously, the Group B participants expressed how they would make a conscientious decision to volunteer through their family, work, church and community.

One participant stated:

> My father would say that helping others is a part of the rent you pay for the space that you take up on Earth. (B1)

Research suggested those who are likely to be asked to volunteer for formal organizations are individuals that possess human, social and cultural capital. Among African Americans in this study, participants reported over-saturation with “being asked” to volunteer. One female remarked:

> We are saturated with requests to volunteer. However, when you ask organizations if they have spoken with the leadership organizations like AADLP (African American Development Leadership Program), LLDP (Latino Leadership
Development Program), or Leadership Rochester, invariably the response is they do not possess skill sets, experiences and resources that are needed. (B2)

Unlike Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches*, where participants were oppressed by personal circumstances, Group B, *Getting Down to Business* volunteers experienced systemic oppression, especially in a majority of socially dominant, formal volunteer organizations. As stated by a volunteer:

I am being required to do a number of things to be on a board, but it is not serving from my passion, my love, my need to give back. This is something that needs to be critically addressed because it is affecting our ability to reach deeper into the generations that we really need for sustainability. (B2)

In spite of these challenges, the participant devised strategies to help navigate their perceived barriers to formal volunteering,

There are several significant differences between Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches* and Group B, *Getting Down to Business*. First is the level of empowerment. The researcher found that participants with high socio-economic status had more control over all aspects of their lives. Those with lower socioeconomic status had to be taught how to become empowered through the training received from a social service organization. One female participant responded:

I had been with the social service program for many, many years. I raised two of my grandchildren, and we went through lot of things [difficulties]. My granddaughter had been molested, and my grandson had ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder]. Our coordinator would bring different people to advise us
on how we would go about taking care of our children that had disabilities.

Eventually, she opened up the mentoring program. (A3)

Second in importance is when and where participants in this study provided their volunteer service. In this study, Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches* provided peer-to-peer service at the local community level for one organization. Volunteering at the grassroots level gave these individuals a sense of self-worth and self-actualization, a contribution to skills development, an increase in social inclusion, and an enhancement to services. A grandmother shared:

> At one point, I was lacking 22 points for my GED. Through this program, I have been inspired to finish up my high school education. (A2)

This activity is role modeling for her grandchildren she is raising. Volunteering assumes an especially important role among the elderly because it can “inoculate or protect them . . . from hazards of retirement, physical decline and inactivity” (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993, p. 9). Another volunteer commented:

> I find that volunteering is keeping me from sitting home and growing old and depressed. (A5)

Group B, *Getting Down to Business* participants were professional volunteers who donated their talent gained from a variety of formal and informal resources consisting of education, community involvement and white-collar jobs to a variety of nonprofit volunteer boards. Confidently stated by a volunteer:

> My father would ask me questions about what I thought about something. I grew up with the kind of confidence about exploration of thought and ideas. (B1)
Third was pathway that led to their participation in formal organizations. Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches* faced a difficult and constrained background because of their limited human, social and cultural capital. Due to their circumstances, the participants touched several systems: schools, social service agencies, legal, and other resources in their communities. Group B, *Getting Down to Business* had a smoother transition to enter formal volunteering because of their social connections from employment, church, and community recognition. A male volunteer said:

I had the good fortune of working in a corporation that supported the idea that volunteerism is a fundamental part of one’s responsibility. (B4)

Similarly, another male mentioned:

One of my co-workers was involved in the adopt-a-school program at School #39. We were working with the principal and some of the teachers to try and get more minority students involved in math and science. (B6)

Interestingly, although these participants found access to volunteerism in formal organizations, often they acknowledged barriers in trying to provide their service and skill sets. According to the volunteers, there are barriers and access issues to volunteering that are not often recognized by organizations that are recruiting volunteers. Within the African American community, volunteering is understood as operating through informal systems such as the church, and in helping neighbors, relatives. This was not defined as “volunteering”, but as being of service. Some narratives revealed that retired African Americans view the term “volunteer” negatively because it tends to exclude those who want to provide their service due to some groups’ volunteer requirements.
In the volunteer literature, concerns about the financial cost associated with volunteering were particularly important to those with low or fixed incomes, especially post-retirement volunteering (Cnaan & Cwikel, 1992; Davis-Smith & Gay, 2005). A volunteer stated:

Twenty and thirty years ago, it was not a problem to volunteer because organizations were looking for skills. Today, nonprofit organizations need money. (B3)

With frustration in her voice, she added:

One of the first challenges we encountered is in providing OUR skill sets and OUR service. We constantly have barriers when we try to provide OUR service. Opportunities for volunteer roles are only given for softer positions. In my opinion, the critical places on boards are the nominating committee or finance. However, we will be looked to support softer positions. For example, community and fund-raising development, and event committee positions, which we know in many organizations is a place where we [African Americans] can fit. (B2)

Taking a breath:

I have been on the African American Development Leadership (AALDP) faculty where they teach board leadership. I have been a part of teaching it for at least eight years out of its history. What is interesting is the simulation doesn’t necessarily come close to what we know is experienced in formal volunteering. What I find interesting about that is when I raised the question why don’t you prior to rolling out the curriculum pick an organization that actually has an event then I could work with the people to plan an event. You can actually do
something real instead of simulated. With a sigh, she stated I found resistance from the organization to change it to reality bas. They [African American Leadership Development] reply is no, we are not able to do that. (B2)

The next narrative continues to illustrate this challenge with providing their skills to formal volunteer organizations. A male described:

I attended an eight hour class at the Red Cross. The person sat at the end of the table and read from a book. I had to listen for eight hours; and it drove me up the wall. I wanted to redesign the training program, but they [volunteer organization] gave me another assignment. (B6)

Third, Group C, Setting the Record Straight consisted of six participants (3 males and 4 females), who had the same demographic profile as Group B, Getting Down To Business. The researcher found four distinctions when comparing Group A, Grandmothers in the Trenches and Group B, Getting Down to Business, to Group C, Setting The Record Straight. First was the social capital that exposed Group C to formal volunteering. They relied heavily on social connections. Several participants noted that somebody knew them from work, school, or community involvement. A female acknowledged:

When I came to this community, people were asking me to volunteer because they knew me from my job. (C7)

However, Group B, Getting Down to Business, talked about volunteering as innate, and Group A, Grandmothers in the Trenches as a circumstance. Second, distinctions were drawn from the volunteer roles. Group A, Grandmothers in the Trenches provided peer-to-peer mentoring and advocacy. Group B, Getting Down to
Business primarily volunteered for executive board level, decision-making and leadership positions, and Group C, Setting the Record Straight, included grassroots volunteering at the local and non-local communities, and professional-level volunteering. Worth noting were the differences in responses to what they felt were the reasons why African Americans volunteers were less often represented in formal volunteering. In the case of Group A, Grandmothers in the Trenches, what affected volunteering was due to their low socioeconomic status. Group B, Getting Down to Business mentioned institutional structure, volunteer requirements and financial commitments, which can be used as an exclusionary formula. The final cohort, Group C, Setting the Record Straight, was skeptical about the measurement tools used for volunteering statistics. The participants expressed the view that surveys tend to look at socioeconomic level without taking into consideration where it is distributed, who is targeted, and what is measured. With skepticism, a male stated:

When surveys are done, it comes out as if African Americans have fallen short. Like I said earlier around this table, people go to whom they know, for instance, Neilson poll ratings. I never had anybody come and ask me any questions about that. So if you pick a neighborhood, let’s say any suburban neighborhood most likely in this town, it is 99% people who are majority [white] folks. Okay, so if you go to Webster and do a hundred survey questions, you are going to get that perspective. The five or six blacks that live in Webster, maybe you will get two. So when the survey is done, I am looking at 96 versus two. When black institutions ask us questions, then you are going get an over majority. If it is about
sports, they are going to ask us that, if it is about church and gospel music, they are going to ask us [African Americans]. (C6)

Researchers also suggested that there may be differences in how ethnic groups volunteer both informally and formally, and these activities may also be undercounted (Burr et al, 2007; McCain et al., 2000; Navaie-Wailser et al., 2001; Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006). Carlton-LaNey (2006; 2007) noted that the church is a major site for volunteerism and broader civic engagement among African American older adults, but many of the activities are not so classified by researchers.

Two suggestions offered by participants is to first include in studies information and insights about volunteer venues where African Americans are likely to volunteer, such as in fraternities, sororities, community organizations, and churches. Secondly, would be to take the total population and calculate participation rates by taking a percentage by race of those who are actively volunteering. To calculate volunteering in this manner could yield a more effective rate for volunteerism as reported for African Americans. Some more observations can be found in (Appendix E).

In Chapter 5, the results and these themes (human, social, and cultural) are discussed more thoroughly and compared to related literature, recommendations for the field of volunteerism are outlined, and the limitations of the study are described, as well as suggestions for further research.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications And Conclusion

This chapter presents a discussion of findings of the focus groups with retired African American volunteers including a discussion of the findings compared to related literature and recommendations for the field of volunteerism. This chapter closes with a brief conclusion including a summary of study strengths and limitations and suggestions for further research.

This chapter relates the study results to the theoretical framework of Wilson and Musick’s (1997) Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work, which states that human (education, income, health, age, time), social (informal and formal connections), and cultural capital (beliefs, norms) are predictors for formal volunteering. Wilson and Musick, (1997); and Wilson (2000) suggest that individual characteristics are often viewed as human resources that contribute to volunteer participation. As discussed in the literature review, traditionally the volunteer profile is of a female, married, and young (<75) adults are likely to volunteer. (Fischer et al., 1991; Marriott Senior Living Services, 1991). Additionally, older adults who had higher levels of education, higher income, better health, and religious affiliation are more likely to participate in volunteering (Caro & Bass, 1995; Herzog & Morgan, 1993; Kim & Hong, 1997; Tang, 2006; Wilson & Musick, 1997). The next section includes a discussion of the two most important capitals: social and cultural capitals, which were reported by participants across all focus groups.
Examination of Social and Cultural Capital

Figure 5.1 indicates compares the perceptions between focus groups. The two capitals, social and cultural, are key components of African American volunteers’ participation. When discussing social capital the social networks and class of volunteers is considered. From this dissertation, we know that individuals’ access to social capital is found by participating in social networks, which consist of people with the same or similar interests. However, an individual’s social class and socio-economic status affect the types of social capital they have to use to facilitate participating in formal volunteering. As Putnam (2000) explains, social capital enables communities to work together toward a common goal, for mutual benefit. There are three kinds of social capital: (a) bonding (closed), (b) bridging, and (c) linking. Importantly, all forms of social capital operate in particular ways, offering various kinds of support and depending on particular types of networks.

Figure 5.1 identifies social and cultural capital as the dominant predictor for recruitment of potential African American volunteers from both low and high socio economic statuses.

Figure 5.1. Examination of social and cultural capital.
**Bonding (closed) social capital.** Putnam (2000) describes bonding social capital as strong ties within insular communities such as family networks or institutions that are similar to each other, and participating in exclusive sharing relationships. Generally speaking, family, friendship and neighborhood ties can be thought of as “bonding” ties. Thus, bonding social capital involves cohesive neighborhood or ethnic groups. The sense of community can come from shared interests, cultures, and values from a neighborhood, race, or other factors. For example, in African American communities, Putnam (1993) states, “historically, the black church has been the most bounteous treasure-house of social capital for African Americans. [It has] provided the organizational infrastructure for political mobilization in the civil rights movement [and] is a uniquely powerful resource for political engagement among blacks—an arena in which to learn about public affairs and hone political skills and make connections” (p. 7).

For this study’s Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches*, the use of friends and family connections by those from low socio-economic backgrounds is less likely to result in participation in formal volunteering, than for Group B, *Getting Down to Business*, or for Group C, *Setting the Record Straight* from higher socio-economic circumstances, who are more likely to use professional contacts. Unpredictably, the *Democrat and Chronicle* (a local Rochester newspaper) published an article on Saturday, July 7, 2012, entitled *Conkey Cruisers to stay “presidentially” fit*. This article describes a citizen’s call to action to address physical fitness in her low-income neighborhood. Theresa Bowick, while jogging in her neighborhood, was approached by a resident who asked if she was running from the police. Surprised by this, Ms. Bowick decided to address this issue informally. The tendency to use such bonding social capital to find resources is not
unique to the African American community. Her passion to resolve this problem, and wanting to make a difference in the physical health of community members, eventually led to partnerships with local organizations and community leaders to bring Conkey Cruisers to fruition, including finding volunteers and bikes.

This dissertation shows that an individual’s social and cultural capital varies, and that these different volunteer capital profiles relate to particular types of volunteering. Individuals who use bonding social capital often turn to familiar networks of people like themselves to find resources. While those social networks can provide important instrumental supports (such as child care, transportation, and information about programs) they can also help or hinder relationships among people. As a result, this community is a closed social capital network for a selected part of the African American community. Bowick hopes that as this program increases it will become a model for building physically healthy community neighborhoods.

The next section discusses how bridging and linking social capital can uniformly include people from various socioeconomic backgrounds interested in sharing their resources among members of the community, regardless of class.

**Bridging and linking social capital.** According to Putnam (2000), both bridging and linking require that people develop trust outside of their familiar communities. “Bridging social capital” refers to trusting relationships across diverse groups, among those who differ on key personal characteristics, such as race, class, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, type of institution, or political affiliation, regardless of dominant status. These ties help different kinds of people in the community get to know each other, build relationships and share information. In this study’s Group B, *Getting
Down to Business and Group C, Setting the Record Straight such ties often serve as venues linking to volunteer work, social connections, personal satisfaction, spiritual well-being, and support to individuals who were less fortunate. In contrast, as illustrated in Group A, Grandmothers in the Trenches narratives, low-income communities often lack both the social capital to garner needed resources and the political clout to meet their needs.

Social capital is based, in part, on cultural capital, which also tends to have exclusionary traits. Culture refers to habits, cultural symbols, symbols, belief systems and knowledge that identify someone as belonging to a particular group. Carter (2003), Lin (2001), Wilson & Musick (1997), and Bourdieu (1993) describe cultural capital as a sense of collective identity among participants in order to unite them behind a common goal.

Like social capital, cultural capital also plays a vital role in volunteer participation. Both social and cultural capitals are rooted in linking people together; however, they can play a divisive role in communities. Recognizing these limitations, community-based volunteers and volunteer organizations need to know how to work with those in power to build trust-based linking relationships.

For Putnam (2000), linking social capital involves social relationships with those in authority or positions of power and is useful for garnering resources. Linking social capital often depends on the ability of those who control key resources (such as government, employers, citywide financial institutions, or foundations) to create trust-based relationships with the people that rely on resources from nonprofit organizations. For example, a social service agency used Group A, Grandmothers in the Trenches,
bonding social capital to link these participants to opportunities and tangible benefits that led to a positive change for grandmothers raising grandchildren, the African American community and the city as a whole. As such, membership to organizations, communities, and faith-based affiliations in and of itself does not foster either bridging or bonding social capital. Each individual, community, and organization has its own set of values, norms, and behaviors that facilitate members fulfilling their needs. First, the development of trusting relationships with each other has to be maintained before any expansion of social capital ties can occur. Taken together, these examples suggest that nurturing bonding, bridging and linking involves collaboration between all involved in the delivery of services and in the volunteer recruitment process.

Discussion of Findings

This section includes a discussion of the findings. The discussion is organized by the theoretical constructs of human capital, social capital, and cultural capital.

**Human capital.** Human capital includes education, income, age, health, and time.

**Education.** The findings from descriptive analyses of individual characteristics show that the relationships of human capital to volunteering are mixed. Indicators of human capital are more consistently associated with formal volunteer work. Studies routinely find that highly educated individuals participate in more volunteer activity than those who are less educated (Chambré, 1993; Wilson & Musick, 1997). However, Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches* participants are African American females with low socioeconomic status. The informal education of these grandmothers allow them to utilize the services of a social service organization. They started to provide support to
other grandmothers raising grandchildren, which eventually led them to formal volunteering. As expected, those with more education, Group B, *Getting Down to Business*, and Group C, *Setting the Record Straight* represent the dominant status model because their educational achievement makes it more likely for them to be asked to volunteer. Nevertheless, the support of the theory is mixed in relation to the volunteer profile being a female.

With respect to gender, for Group B, *Getting Down to Business*, and Group C, *Setting the Record Straight* the results of this study reveal African American males do engage in formal volunteering. Worth noting is that this study among African Americans refutes there were “no socioeconomic differences in volunteering” (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000, p.1558). For example, both poor and rich Black Americans were equally likely to volunteer.

**Income.** As previously noted in the literature review (Chapter 2), the pattern of results suggest that there are racial differences in volunteering. Caro and Bass (1995), Fisher and Schaffer (1993), Herzog and Morgan (1993), and Musick, Herzog, and House (1999) all note that socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the most significant factors associated with a greater likelihood for volunteer participation. Additionally, Musick, Wilson, and Bynum (2000) find that socio-economic status is what makes the difference in who gets recruited to volunteer. We can surmise Group A, *Grandmother in The Trenches* participants who retired from blue-collar positions would have not possessed the human capital often targeted by formal volunteer recruiters. Evidence from the study confirms that their personal economic conditions do not deter these grandmothers from initiating their own volunteer opportunity to gain access and support. On the other hand,
the volunteers characteristics of Group B, *Getting Down to Business* and Group C, *Setting the Record Straight* are similar to the dominant status group which include high levels of human capital, social capital, and cultural capital. This gives the latter two groups easier access to formal volunteering.

**Age.** Based on the results from this study, the African American participants who are ages 55 years old and older do not volunteer less often, contrary to the national statistics for 2012. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) reports that age 35-to 44-year olds and 45- to 54-year-olds were the most likely to volunteer.

**Health.** Depending on one’s health status, volunteer work can be a resource or a constraint (Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993). Results from the survey questionnaire show that participants’ health is not a major barrier to their volunteer work.

**Time.** Research suggests that people more likely to volunteer their time have more education and higher incomes, feel more obligated to help others, and have more social contacts (Einolf, 2011). In this study, the less-educated and economically less-advantaged group of grandmothers spend significantly more time in informal volunteering, whereas the highly-educated and high-income business and community leaders spend more time in formally organized voluntary work. Formal organizations are generally defined as unpaid work for or through structured organizations and groups (Bittman & Fischer 2006). This type of volunteering is the most commonly used and the most easily and simply measured.

**Social capital.** Research states that when it comes to formal volunteering, whites volunteer more than African Americans (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum 2000). Additionally, African Americans are still less likely than whites to be asked to volunteer. As explained in Chapter 4, several of the narratives reveal that African Americans are engaged in both
informal and formal volunteer work. However, the pathway that led them to formal volunteer work is linked to their individual social resources.

There are differences in types of social networks with the less-educated and lower-income participants being more likely to have social networks based in their neighborhood, social groups and church networks, all of which are likely to facilitate informal voluntary work. For instance, Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches* life circumstances and involvement at the community level re vehicles through which these grandmothers are exposed to the possibility of becoming volunteers. This involvement provides an opportunity to do volunteer work with an organization where they have an existing relationship. Both in Group B, *Getting Down to Business*, and Group C, *Setting the Record Straight* volunteers’ higher levels of education and income facilitate greater social networks, which make them more apt to be asked to become volunteers.

Additionally, there are conditions that these African American participants feel help nurture them to become volunteers. These conditions include a welcoming environment, a sense of trust, and being part of a support team.

**Cultural capital.** Two studies suggest that personal beliefs and values are important for at least some types of volunteer behavior (Finkelstein, Penner, & Brannick, 2005; Piliavin, Dovidio, & Schroeder, 2005). Individuals who acknowledge a strong belief in the importance of serving others may be more likely to participate in activities consistent with these beliefs, although the causal association between belief and action is not entirely clear (Wilson, 2000). Likewise, the findings of this study show that early life experiences in the home are one of the elements through which they perceive their path to formal volunteer participation. Many African Americans engage in volunteer work that
relates to the well-being and development of their communities, while others are involved in activities in the wider community and view volunteering as a method of actively getting involved with other people with similar interests. Interestingly, the results suggest that the cultural tendencies of African Americans are primarily focused on activities for the family and kinship network, even if participants are less fortunate themselves. Following are recommendations for creating partnerships between African American, volunteer coordinator and formal volunteer organizations.

**Implications for the Field of Volunteerism**

This section discusses the results and implications for the field of volunteerism as it relates to African American volunteers, volunteer coordinators, and secular companies wishing to be more diverse in their recruitment strategies.

**African American volunteers.** The results imply African Americans of both low and high socioeconomic status do volunteer but not always in the mainstream tradition. American Americans are motivated for a number of reasons. Many want to give back for what they themselves have received. Helping others is not something that is viewed by African Americans as something done at a particular time, for a particular group. Serving others occurs every day as needs arise. Caregiving and volunteerism are second nature to African Americans, first in the context of home and secondarily in their community and church. These numerous contributions are not reflected in the various statistics gathered on volunteerism in the United States. Burr et al. (2005) defines formal volunteering as discretionary activity for most persons, while informal caring is often considered obligatory, especially when the recipient is a family member (Choi et al, 2007; Hank & Stock, 2008). The lack of measurement of informal volunteering suggests that certain
types of volunteering (for example, formal service) are more highly valued. The challenge for volunteer organizations is to find strategies to connect, facilitate, and encourage African Americans to extend their help beyond the African American community. This study finds that one reason for so few African Americans in mainstream organizations is they have never been asked to help by formal volunteer recruiters, who tend to select participants based on the traditional volunteer profile, which is white and affluent.

**Volunteer coordinators.** In terms of the dissertation analysis, entry into the African American community depends on building long-term relationships with people and having cultural capital to be accepted. Personal relationships are the foundation of the community. This applies across all levels of education and socioeconomic status. First, volunteer coordinators need to spend time learning about the African American community and the individuals within it to establish trust. Second, they need to learn how African Americans view mainstream organizations and issues involving the greater community by attending organizations and events held in African American community. Additionally, this will help to target perceived leaders in the African American community and to demonstrate respect for their culture and differences that exist between African Americans and mainstream organizations. Third, volunteer coordinators and staff should be able to relate with and be accepted by community members. As part of establishing a presence in the community, being able to relate the organization’s mission and goals to issues that impact the African American community is critical to conveying that the organization is worthwhile and meaningful for their family and community.
Worth noting, to get more people of color within an organization a participant from Setting the Record Straight gave this insight:

In my organization we had Black, Hispanic and White volunteers. What I found out is that a lot of people don’t know what you have to offer. You really have to be specific and honest. Volunteers want to know what you want to accomplish, do they have input, and how they can become a part of it. It you are very specific I think people will be more likely to volunteer. (C2)

Secular organizations. Some participants note that some secular organizations will have to demonstrate cultural competence for African American culture and explain what impact volunteering will have on their life and family. For instance, low socioeconomic status individuals are often overlooked; usually they have time, but may need child care assistance and transportation to become involved. As described in the narratives of Group A, Grandmother in the Trenches, volunteers do have skills to offer and become engaged in formal volunteering once they are shown how they could help. A supportive environment is needed to provide quality training and support. Secular organizations will need to review organizational policies and practices to determine if they may inhibit African Americans and other cultural groups’ access and participation to formal volunteering. In a thorough analysis of integrated inputs that lead to volunteering, however, Wilson and Musick assert that “entry into the volunteer labor force requires three different kinds of capital – human, social, and cultural – and that different forms of volunteer work draw on different kinds of capital” (Wilson & Musick 1997, p. 709). If Wilson and Musick are indeed accurate in their assertion, then encouraging volunteerism among individuals who have limited access to building human, social and cultural capital
becomes especially important for the continuation of social capital production. In turn, building relationships with African American and other cultures will broaden the base of volunteers, strengthen programs and services to expand them, and streamline how nonprofits manage new recruits to increase access and to benefit the community as a whole.

Furthermore, based on these findings different strategies are needed for formal organizations to recruit and retain African American volunteers. Concluding this section is a discussion of several recommendations.

**Recommendations**

There are four main recommendations that result from the dissertation study.

**Recommendation #1 – collaborative networks.** First, to facilitate more participation of African Americans in formal volunteering, recruiters should start with the population groups who are already connected to the organization. This should include both the recipient and members of the volunteer organization. The cultural tendencies of African Americans described in this study; suggests that their volunteerism will be less formal and structured, but more focused on the extended family and cultivated at the community level. Bearing this in mind, nonprofits should capitalize on the fact that most volunteers are recruited by those people they already know. This approach of asking a friend, family member or a colleague to volunteer with current volunteer will make it more likely to get a positive response for prospective volunteers. Current volunteers and recipients of services are usually willing to talk favorably about volunteer organizations with which they have an affiliation. For example, Points of Light Foundation (2000) suggests that to ensure successful partnerships with low-income communities, it is critical
that outside organizations acknowledge and build on existing community assets. Also the use of online technology and electronic communication systems by corporations and companies to encourage employee volunteerism could be increased (Wallace, 2004; Wilhem, 2004).

Second, education outreach should be conducted at community centers, neighborhood associations, and faith-based organizations to maximize nonprofit exposure and involvement and to introduce the concept of formal volunteering. Literature suggests that a broader perspective is needed such as the one adopted by Wilson (2000) who defines volunteerism as “any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person group, organization” (p. 21). Broadening the definition makes it possible to include formal organizational based activities as well as informal assistance to family members and friends and neighbors. A restricted definition and focus on formal volunteering through certain associations results in the diminished visibility of many other activities and serves to exclude some groups and activities from the conversation on volunteering (Martinson, 2006).

Third, collaboration between organizations to do outreach makes best use of existing community resources. They should enlist the support of African American role models within the community who are emerging leaders. Both majority (black or white) dominated organizations should invite these local leaders to serve on advisory committees, to judge events, and to be guest speakers. The importance of building these relationships will develop trust between the volunteer recruiter and the individuals in the community.
Recommendation #2 – Motivations. According to the Marriott Seniors Volunteerism Study taken in 1991, the motive most frequently endorsed by older volunteers as a major reason for volunteering is “to help others” (83%). Other motives for volunteering includes “to feel useful or productive” (65%) and “to fulfill a moral responsibility” (51%) (Okun, Barr, & Herzog, 1998). Other survey data shows that Americans are more likely to volunteer benefits they have reaped and believe that enhancing the moral basis of society is an important personal goal, independent of whatever personal and social resources the might possess (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000). Moreover, there are seven reasons cited by Wilson (2000) why people may choose to volunteer: (a) costs and benefits of volunteer work, (b) having a stake in their volunteer work, (c) anticipation of needing help someday or have already received help and wanting to give something back, (d) benefits received from work, (e) receiving awards, (f) solidarity benefits such as socializing, and (g) to compensate for deprivations experienced in their full-time employment.

From the focus groups, several of the participants describe their motivation to volunteer as giving back to the community where they came from, volunteering for issues that are pertinent to African Americans, and to create future sustainability for younger African American volunteers to participate in formal volunteering. Several of the above motivations are significant to this study, which can help nonprofits identify volunteer opportunities directly in line with the values of African Americans. In creating volunteer programs for this population, these motivations should be adhered to by tailoring programs to fit the interests of the African American community, and by designing projects that unite black majority and white dominated organization participation. For
example, an approach would be for existing institutions, such as faith communities, trade unions, charitable foundations, and companies to invest in projects working to improve social connectedness in communities by utilizing existing services and organizations. Institutions could also encourage donors, members, and employees to stay active in their community by highlighting the benefits of volunteering and being active in organizations (Kawachi & Berkman, 2000).

**Recommendation #3 – Flexibility in volunteer opportunities.** The rationale for flexibility in volunteer roles is due to changing demographics in the marketplace. Flexibility in job scheduling and volunteer commitment has been recognized as essential in recruiting and retaining volunteers. The days of traditional volunteering are fading due to several factors, especially true for older adults such as family members with caregiving responsibilities or functional limitations (Center for Health Communication, 2004).

According to Tang, Morrow-Howell, and Hong (2007) when volunteers have a choice to adjust schedules and select the types of activities, this flexibility increases the recruitment of older adults from diverse backgrounds. Although flexibility of roles is not emphasized as a strategy in the narratives from this study’s focus group participants, it would seem that it should be considered as a strategy to attract those who do not fit the traditional volunteer profile. Next is a discussion of the limitations of this study.

**Limitations of the Study**

This dissertation has limitations. First, this study had been conducted among a purposive sample of retired African American volunteers. This study could have been more informative if volunteers were selected at the community level. There are volunteers who are providing a service to an organization because they are in need of that
kind of service. Many do not see themselves as a volunteer. For instance, in Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches*, a grandmother mentioned volunteering at a food shelter to receive two bags of food. In addition, another grandmother talked about volunteering because the organization was able to provide transportation and child care.

According to The Corporation for National and Community Service (2011), 35-to 44 year-olds and 45- to 54 year-olds were the most likely to volunteer. Persons in their early twenties are the least likely to volunteer. After middle age, volunteering rates begin to decline as people age. In addition, some researchers have found that the majority of parents volunteer for activities that directly affect their children, such as Little League and school functions (Wilson, 2000). Based on this information an area of research would be to study the generation before this age demographic group. They are Generation X, those born between 1965 and 1981; 35-to 44-year-olds would provide a broader picture of African American volunteering. In Group B, *Getting Down to Business*, a female stated:

I would suggest you do a survey on the group prior to this one. I find many of them are volunteering in their schools to keep up with what is happening to their children. Also, they may be in Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts. (B2)

Second, this study only explores the perspectives of 20 African American participants volunteer experiences in formal volunteer organizations. Therefore, the theoretical explanations presented are culturally limited. It might be helpful to know how a greater number of diverse participants and organizations would affect the study results.

Finally, an area to research is African American graduates from leadership development programs. Research is needed to investigate and evaluate if these programs
have been successful in educating graduates who successfully recruit African Americans in formal volunteer organizations. As noted by a participant:

> We can’t assume that everyone is volunteering from leadership organizations. You [the researcher] could do a survey using survey monkey and send it to all those leadership organizations and ask why they are not volunteering. I know many of them are not volunteering because they need to put food on the table. You know that is low hanging fruit. (B1)

The focus of the next section discusses differences between the integrated theory of volunteer work and the focus group participants’ experiences.

**Barriers to Volunteering: Integrated Theory Versus Focus Group Experiences**

Wilson and Musick (1997) Integrated Theory of Volunteer work, which provides the theoretical foundation for this study, suggests that of senior African Americans who participate in secular, formal volunteering, at the conclusion of each focus group session, participants were asked “If there was any additional information they would like to tell me about volunteering?” “The question is designed to give participants an opportunity to add any additional information that was not covered in the focus group sessions about volunteering. According to the focus group volunteers, there are indeed barriers and access issues relating to their volunteering efforts that are not often recognized by organizations looking for volunteers. The barriers and access issues that participants mentioned include job discrimination, unwelcoming environment, inability to use skill sets, difference in cultural norms, not having a comfort level, lack of diversity, not leading with an open hand, and ownership
**Human capital.** Drawing on human capital theory, there is evidence suggesting those possessing sufficient human capital are more likely to volunteer (Wilson & Musick 1997). According to Wilson (2000), education boosts volunteering because it heightens the awareness of problems, increases empathy, and builds self-confidence. Educated people are more likely to volunteer and also more likely belong to several organizations. These organizational attachments provide volunteers with outlets for them to develop valuable civic skills (the ability to conduct meetings). For example, The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) also suggests that the types of activities that volunteers perform are influenced by their educational attainment.

**Findings.** Group A, *Grandmothers in the Trenches* participants reported low education attainment, low household income, and rated their functional health as fair. Theory tells us that individuals with low-socioeconomic status are less likely to know about formal volunteer opportunities or have the financial resources that would enable them to participate. In spite of their socioeconomic status, these grandparents found what could be characterized as pathways to formal opportunities. That is, they found a relationship of reciprocity, where the volunteer benefits from the voluntary activity as much as the volunteer activity itself helps its intended beneficiaries. Interestingly, the primary activities performed by *Grandmothers in the Trenches* are peer-to peer mentoring, recruiting, and advocacy work.

As could be expected, it is seen for participants in Group B, *Getting Down to Business* and Group C, *Setting the Record Straight*, that because they achieved greater educational attainment, they are more likely than those with less education to tutor or teach, or to provide professional or management assistance to nonprofit organizations.
These highly educated volunteers are least likely to collect, make, or distribute clothing, crafts, or goods. Their volunteer activities tend to be in agreement with findings from United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), and Musick and Wilson (2000), who reported that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to volunteer for more than one organization than were those with less education.

Studies have also found a strong relationship between social class and volunteerism in the United States. The higher the status, the more one is apt to volunteer. Wilson (2000) indicates that this is not only a reflection of greater access to volunteer institutions, but also because higher-status professionals are those most likely to be asked to volunteer. And those with higher incomes may also have the luxury of leisure time that they can devote to volunteering. Empirically, the effects of income on rates of volunteerism are mixed, but statistics (Freeman 1997; Wilson 2000), conclude that volunteers are drawn largely from the middle and upper classes.

**Social capital.** A social capital theory stipulates that individuals with multiple social ties are more likely to volunteer because of the culture of the organizations to which they belong (Apinunmahakul & Devlin, 2008; Bowman, 2004; Janoski, Musick, & Wilson, 1998; Jones, 2006; Sokolowski, 1996; Brown & Ferris, 2007). Musick et al., (2000) reports that being asked to volunteer increases the probability of volunteering by 45%, whereas Bowman (2004) estimates that active recruitment increases the odds of volunteering by 2.26 (126%). However, recruiters are unlikely to randomly ask individuals if recruiters are likely to be highly selective for both characteristics. That is to say, most volunteers serve because they are asked to volunteer, and most recruiters look for persons with whom they are familiar with locally to volunteer.
**Findings.** The social capital for Group A, *Grandmothers in The Trenches*, operated primarily through informal systems such as helping their grandchildren in the school setting, and helping neighbors, relatives and people in the church. Generally, their connections were limited to people with similar paths in life. These patterns reflect both advantages and disadvantages to formal volunteering. For example, Black kinship networks have a vast number of benefits. During times of economic trouble, these networks can pool together financial, practical and informational resources to provide support for both parents and children (Dressler, 1985; McLoyd, 1990). In single-parent families, support from kinship networks has been proven to positively affect children’s development by providing both supplemental parenting resources as well, indirectly supporting the adjustment to youth (Dornbusch et al., 1986; Tolson & Wilson, 1990). In these situations, the kinship network typically is formed when one family unit absorbs another one. Once they are formed, this extended family network will likely remain over the course of the entire family’s life span (Wilson, 1989).

Black kinship networks provide an additional benefit of being a key factor for finding out about volunteer opportunities. Social ties generated from kinship networks help locate and organize volunteers, and later provide support and encouragement throughout the volunteer process (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000). Thus, not surprisingly, African American volunteers tend to focus on needs more pressing in their own communities and networks (Wilson, 2000). Strong social ties also increase the likelihood of being asked to volunteer, an essential variable in volunteer recruitment.

Even with an emphasis on developing social networks, African American, however, are still less likely than whites to be asked to volunteer (Hodgkinson, 1995).
African Americans not currently engaged in volunteer activities often point to not being asked as the primary reason for them not doing so (Wilson, 2000; Ferry, Barry, & Manno, 1998).

From a more critical perspective, or disadvantage to volunteering, African American kinship ties usually work in communal isolation, which tends not to expose them to resources that extend beyond their community. Depending on the community, resources may be scarce or barely sustainable. Taking the initiative to advocate for the continuation of resources provided by a social service agency, a grandmother described her efforts:

We went to Washington, DC, on behalf of grandparents raising their grandchildren, or any caregiver for that matter. We met with senators and legislators and different people to voice our opinion. We wanted to know why they were trying to cut off a lot of things. Hummm, they probably still are trying too, but when they see groups and people coming together and really caring, they tend to look into it a little bit more, instead of cutting it altogether (A7)

Turning to Group B, Getting Down to Business, and Group C, Setting the Record Straight, having well developed social capital oftentimes opens participants to a variety of nonprofits throughout Monroe County. A male told this narrative:

Let’s say I am involved with sports. Obviously, I am going to be around a lot of sports people. When a question comes up about sports they see me involved with it. It is most likely if I got a brain in my head and articulate myself very well they mostly likely will say that is a good guy right there. He knows a few things. So I get asked to volunteer. I think at the end of the day it gets down to having you
broaden yourself out. It is a matter of exposure as someone would say who you really know and who really knows you. (C6)

Cultural capital. Unexpectedly, participants in the last two focus groups conveyed in some cases that having access to formal volunteering was not mutually beneficial. In the literature, Gill (2006) mentions cultural barriers to volunteering, noting that ethnic minorities may volunteer in different ways or find it difficult to volunteer in “mainstream organizations”.

Findings. The most common barriers and challenges is that, as perceived by focus groups, African American volunteers find exclusionary practices being used by formal volunteer organizations.

The participants note that job discrimination is not unrelated to barriers to formal volunteering. A male volunteer commented:

Volunteering is synonymous with having a job. The majority of organizations have qualifications which you must meet. (B4)

A female volunteer stated:

They self-select us out. I believe it does come fundamentally down to we are not wanted. (B2)

Facing an unwelcoming environment, a respondent commented:

I just retired, and the American Red Cross did a radio announcement for help with Hurricane Katrina. I said that’s it! I decided to initiate my own opportunity by letting them know that I am available for disaster services. For some reason they said, “we will call you”, but I never got the call. I had to make a nuisance of myself to get someone to talk to me. (B6)
Not being able to use our skill sets, he further commented:

When I started volunteering at the Red Cross, I would go on these assignments, and I saw a need for people like us to volunteer. I started asking questions, and the organization said, “Why don’t you do something about it?” I became the trainer for disaster relief services; however, when I tried to redesign their program, I was not able to provide my skills sets (B6).

Differences in cultural norms, can work against changing the way things are done:

If you have ideas out of the construct of their experiences and the way they have done things for a long, long time, you can forget it [anyone listening to your input.] (B1)

Having a comfort level is important. As mentioned by a female volunteer:

You are much more comfortable among people like yourself. If you bring somebody from the outside that is a little different, we might not be as open to them. If you look at it from the perspective of big organizations, they are dominated by people who are not African Americans, who do not know many of us, and who are not as comfortable with us all the time. When we decide who is going on the board, we interview people, and we want to be comfortable with them. By the way it doesn’t matter what credentials they have, if they have a little … what do we call it, “edge”? We come up with something like that person isn’t really a good fit. For instance, we really have enough finance people. What we really need is marketing people. (C7)
Another expressed challenge by participants is that some access to and participation in formal volunteer organizations rests in part with African American volunteers as well. A volunteer elaborated:

I think it is important to find things that you are passionate around and make sure that you are reaching out. One of the earlier boards I went on, I actually went to the CEO and said, “My management wants me on your board.” Actually, I am still on that board and when my term is up, I come back on after I sit out for one year. I think it is really important for us as people of color or African Americans to not wait until we are approached, but to think about what you have a passion around. What is it that you are interested in? Then let people know, and then find a way to go where you would like to be as opposed to waiting for someone to ask you. I know that it is human nature, and many people say all the time that “nobody asked me”. But I think that is very important for African Americans because there are a lot of places where decisions are being made and things done that impact us or the community where we could be valuable asset. (C7)

In a serious manner, another female noted that diversity

Is not their problem; it is our problem because it cuts the community as a whole short from resources that should be available to us, our families and children. (B1)

In agreement, a volunteer voiced:

It is up to us to say if we can’t do that, and what else we can do if we really want to be a part of that effort. (B2)

On not leading with an open hand, a female shared:
We don’t believe; therefore, we don’t lead with an open hand. If you close your hand, nothing flows in and nothing flows out. Somehow we have to build in this next generation an understanding that you are only here temporarily. We cannot hold on forever. Somehow we need to reach back and bring the people behind us forward. (B1)

Ownership was echoed by a volunteer:

I think as African Americans that we really have to work at getting people to stop overusing the few people that they know and get them comfortable with that next generation or with somebody that is your peer and try to open the door for somebody else. (C7)

Finally, regarding difficulty networking with each other and not utilizing people who have gone through leadership programs, a female stated:

We don’t use our six degrees of influence. Very often we forget to put in a word, to recommend someone, and to connect. (B2)

**Implications for Future Research**

The discussions between the focus groups of this study are exhaustive of many of the issues thought to be important to the engagement of African Americans in formal volunteering. Future research should focus on more motivational and perceptual differences in regard to volunteering among cultural groups other than African Americans. The findings will help volunteer organizations develop strategies in the most culturally sensitive way to recruit volunteers from different cultural backgrounds.

Another area for researchers to concentrate on are the measurement tools. One complication is the fact that there are two main types of volunteering: formal and
informal. Volunteering is generally understood to mean the range of activities that happens within formalized organizations such as nonprofit, public, and government sectors with significant resources and networks at their disposal (Morrow-Howell, 2010). In contrast, informal volunteering is the spontaneous and sporadic helping that takes place between friends and neighbors—for example, childcare, running errands, and loaning equipment—or in response to natural or man-made disasters. It is the dominant form of volunteering in many cultures. A significant number of African American volunteers do not describe their activities as “volunteering;” indeed, there are instances where the term itself has negative connotations for them. However, the objectives of their work—alleviation of hardship, community support and self-development—do not differ from those of larger, formalized agencies.

From the literature review (Chapter 2), differences in rates of volunteering can contribute to the distinction between formal and informal survey design. For instance, Americans’ Changing Lives surveys defines volunteering as only formal, and Current Population Survey conducted through the federal government uses only formal volunteering in measuring service. Such undercounting of African American volunteers has several implications: First, surveys do not include a category for volunteer work done for religious organizations. Since volunteering through the church appears to be a large part of volunteer activities, especially for African Americans. This may in part explain the lower rates reported. Additionally, African Americans have long served their communities, fraternities, sororities, and churches, but are not being recognized for their efforts. To dispute the statistics that report whites volunteer more than African Americans, future research on volunteering rates must use the same methods, survey
design, and definitions to allow for proper comparisons. Such variances cause misleading
generalizations about African American. It is necessary to adopt consistent measurements
to accurately report the trends in volunteering. Also, this would prove to the larger
society that African Americans’ contributions are widespread, valuable and meaningful.

The final area to explore is why some people are not asked to volunteer. There is
a growing body of literature to suggest that, as it relates to formal volunteering, some
people simply are not asked. The Independent Sector data has consistently drawn this
conclusion: It is clear from these findings that young people, single persons, persons from
minority groups, people with disabilities, older and people from lower-income
households are not asked to volunteer in the same proportions as persons who are white,
middle-aged, married, or from middle- and upper-income households.

These findings suggest that the volunteer work force can be significantly
increased if people are simply asked. Given the rapidly changing racial and ethnic
demographics of the United States, the institutions that can successfully attract volunteers
of non-white cultures likely will grow and thrive, and those that do not will wither and
die.

Summary of Findings

In America, volunteering is deeply embedded in most cultures but is manifested
in different ways. However, many people in communities of color are faced with access
limitations and barriers to necessary resources that would allow or encourage them to
participate. The assumption at first glance is this only applies to those who are limited in
human, social and cultural capital, but in fact most cities and communities are often
segregated by SES, race, and ethnicity of citizens who are active in volunteering in their
communities. Against this background, what is not being measured with a reliable instrument are those volunteers who have prevailed and are volunteering in spite of their low socioeconomic level. The narratives provided by Groups A, Grandmother in the Trenches, addressed how some who lack resources gained entrance into mainstream volunteering.

Unfortunately, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and other national surveys continue to measure socioeconomic status as a combination of education, income, and occupation. Under such conditions, SES is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or social class of an individual or groups. As such, this treatment does not include the social and historical complexities of communities of color. Coincidentally, the Democrat and Chronicle (a local Rochester newspaper) published an article on Sunday, March 11, 2012 entitled “Women are a driving force behind higher volunteerism rates.” Similarly, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) released a profile about women who are likely to volunteer. Namely, the profile is a married white woman between 35 and 44, who’s a college graduate, works part time, and has at least one child under 18. These statistics obviously do not reflect the findings of this study.

Instead, such research states formal volunteering primarily is a white and middle class activity. A problem with this approach is African Americans are being less frequently asked to participate (Ferree, Barry, & Manno 1998; Hodgkinson 1995). A concerned volunteer asserted

There is a lot of discrepancy here with this approach taken to assessing . . . that disturbs me. Why do we discount volunteering in the church? It is a big part of our culture and our community, and where we get things accomplished. I do not
even know if that is a fair assessment to decide what we do from a non-secular perspective, especially since the church is such a big part of our community and taking caring of our community. It paints us as not volunteering, not donating, and not giving back. (C7)

Access to volunteer opportunities for minority and ethnic communities has come for the churches, sororities, and fraternities. As a senior male volunteer stated:

We have access to our churches, fraternities, sororities and a few other organizations; primarily [mostly] other organizations are dominated by the [white] majority. (B6)

Generally, religious and fraternal organizations are where many African Americans tend to donate and contribute volunteer hours. Additionally, volunteerism in these settings tends to be more informal, less structured, and consisting of episodic outreach activities such as neighborhood engagement, social service organizations, charity walks, church soup kitchens and sports and school events that focus on ways to benefit their families and communities. Unfortunately, the volunteer efforts of minorities and ethnic communities in many informal settings are not adequately recognized, which might paint a picture that these groups are not contributing to society as fully white sector.

Not surprisingly, The Corporation for National and Community Service (2009) reports that, 5.7 million individuals who identified themselves as African American/Black, did volunteer work in 2009 (the most recent year for which data are available). This was up 400,000 (22.8%), an increase by 1.6% among African American women from 5.3 million (21.2%), who did so in 2008. The CNCS (2009) also reported
Black Americans contributed 792 million hours of volunteer work, which economists estimate is worth about $16.5 billion, a significant effort.

Interestingly, in focus Group B, the African American volunteers, six fit the volunteer profile (4 female, 2 male), comparable to the white majority who dominate formal volunteering. Nonetheless, the above narratives reveal that African American volunteers do encounter access barriers to formal volunteering, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Moreover, given this cultural bias, in assessing reports of minority volunteering, it is logical to assume that African Americans feel less wanted and experience barriers to volunteering, including alienation and perceived discrimination (Akpeki, 1995; Niyazi, 1996).

The final focus Group C presents the voices of seven (7) volunteers (3 men and 4 women) to further explore African American pathways to formal volunteering. This study’s participants describe how having various types of social exposure leads to involvement in formal volunteering. Some describe how their professions introduced them to a variety of volunteering opportunities. Others mention various interactions within their community that provided a portal to formal volunteering. Additionally, having a passion about something and then promoting your own self-interest can be used as an avenue to formal volunteering. One viewpoint, a participant stated:

I think if you have a passion or desire to give back and want to give . . . it just drives everything else. (C1)

In a stern voice, a female said:

Hopefully, part of this will set the record straight; there are two things that people can do to become more involved. First, find things that you are passionate about.
Second make sure that you are reaching out and letting people know what it is that you are passionate about. (C7)

In the final analysis, a male volunteer added:

It all comes down to broadening yourself out and developing a succession plan. It is important to get the person on board so when it’s time to say “I am leaving”, you already have an understudy in place. When we go, that door just closes right behind us. Oftentimes, it is because they just knew you, and now they do not know anybody else. So who they replace you with is somebody that they do know. (C6)

If the same volunteers keep cycling through non-profits, this will result in volunteer burnout as well as an inability to recruit new volunteer talent. Upon reflection, the narratives from this focus group highlights that African American volunteerism is not lacking in participation, but in understanding of their motivations and cultural differences. Wilson and Bynum (2000) point out that “research on racial differences in volunteering is inconclusive because of differences in definitions of volunteering, methods of analysis, and subject populations” (p.1562). Unfortunately, research has tended to exclude many cultural groups who do not share the same family and social values and roles. At the general level, one such common theme is altruism, which includes a desire to help others less fortunate than themselves or to support a cause that is worthwhile.

Altruism appears to be a similar motivation in both majority and non-majority groups, but when we look more closely they actually have different meanings for different cultures. For while this study provided insights of a qualitative nature, to be
more effective in recruiting volunteers of different backgrounds, investigating cultural motivations for volunteering is imperative.

**Conclusion**

Volunteering has a universal value. Everyone has a voice and something to contribute, regardless of their circumstances and needs. Therefore, the promotion and development of strategic links and possible partnerships with African Americans, and diverse ethnic organizations that are grassroots service providers and support groups are needed. This means engaging with and listening to community residents, building relationships to bring the community together to address its concerns, and mobilizing citizens to address them. Too often, programs are developed with the preconceived notion that help or a specific remediation is needed; however, few take the time to understand or educate themselves about these cultural communities. Society is constantly changing. People’s availability to volunteer and their motivations may vary. The challenge for voluntary organizations in an increasingly diverse population is to provide opportunities that appeal to and engage with people from as wide a range of backgrounds and lifestyles as possible.
References


Appendix A

Prospective participant Letter

November 15, 2012

Dear Prospective Participants,

I would like to invite you to participate in an important study on senior African American volunteers. This study is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation and will examine the perceived experiences of senior African Americans, who currently participate in secular, formal volunteering. The results of this study will further the understanding of senior African American volunteers and will be of great value to researchers and practitioners recruitment efforts. I am asking for your participation in this study because of the history of your volunteering efforts, which will contribute greatly to the field of research and volunteering.

Your participation will be most helpful to me, but will also have several benefits to you:

1) You will be making a significant contribution to the profession of volunteering by providing your knowledge as a senior African American. The information you provide can alter the impact of the study and explanation of volunteering.

2) You can help in providing a more accurate representation than before when it comes to volunteerism. There are large bodies of literature on volunteerism but few studies have focused on the experiences of senior African Americans volunteers particularly those who are successfully engaged in secular, formal volunteerism. By participating in the study, you will have the opportunity to add to the current literature on volunteering.

3) You will have an opportunity to share your volunteering experiences with colleagues. The benefits of sharing one’s experience can be gratifying and fun!
I understand that your time is very valuable but I hope you can see the value of participating in this study. The details of participation are attached to this e-mail. If you are willing to be a participant please indicate so by responding to this e-mail and selecting the appropriate response below:

_______ Yes, I am interested.

Please select your first, second and third choice for desired time slot for participation in a focus group session.

_______ 8am – 12 noon  _______ 12pm – 4pm  _______ 4pm – 8pm

_______ Not sure, but I would like more information. Please contact me by Phone/email ________________________________

_______ Sorry, I cannot help at this time.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

Monique C. Adams

Monique C. Adams
Doctoral Student
St. John Fisher College
Rochester, New York 14618
Appendix B

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Volunteer Candidate

Title of study: Self-Perceptions of Senior African Americans Who Participate in Formal Volunteering

Name of researcher: Monique C. Adams
Monique Adams is a doctoral candidate at St. John Fisher College.
Phone for further information: 585-271-6757 or mca01731@sjfc.edu

Purpose of study:
The purpose of the dissertation study is to explore the topic: what are the perceived experiences of senior African Americans who participate in secular, formal volunteering?

Approval of study: This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Instructor of Record: This study is being conducted with the permission of the course instructor(s): Dr. Michael Wischnowski, Ph.D & Dr. Karyl Mammano, Ph.D.

Place of study: Participant prerogative

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below: There are minimal or no risks in this study.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:
All inventories and results will be kept in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed after five years. No names will be identified with comments or from participant work in any publications.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate
2. Withdraw from participation at any time
3. Refuse to answer a particular question
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print name (Participant)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Print name (Investigator)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact Monique C. Adams at any time.
Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Today’s Date: __________________________________________________________

Participant’s Name: __________________________________________________

Circle your gender:  Male  Female

Circle your age group:

Age:  (55-64)  (65-69)  (70-79)  (80-89)  (90 or older)

1. What is the highest education level you completed? (circle)
   a. High school diploma
   b. Bachelor’s degree
   c. Master’s degree
   d. Doctorate

2. What was your last occupation before retirement?

____________________________________________________________________

3. What was your average annual household income before you retired? (circle)
   Optional
   a. Under $25,000
   b. $25,000 - $39,999
   c. $40,000 - $49,999
   d. $50,000 - $74,999
   e. $75,000 - $99,999
   f. $100,000 - $124,999
   g. $125,000 - $149,999
   h. Over $150,000

4. How would you rate your health? (circle)
   a. Excellent
   b. Very Good
   c. Good
d. Fair  
e. Poor  

5. How many hours in total do you volunteer per week? (circle)  
   a. Less than 1 hour per week  
   b. 1 to 5 hour per week  
   c. 5 hours or more per week  

6. At how many organizations do you volunteer?  
   a. One  
   b. Two  
   c. Three  
   d. Four  
   e. Five or more  

7. At what kinds of organizations do you volunteer? (Circle all that apply)  
   a. Hospital  
   b. Community  
   c. Senior Centers  
   d. Churches  
   e. Educational  
   f. Political  
   g. Environmental  
   h. Other  

8. What type of activities do you volunteer for? (circle all that apply)  
   a. Greeter  
   b. Collecting, preparing and distributing food  
   c. Professional management  
   d. Fundraising  
   e. Crafts  
   f. Counseling, medical care, fire, EMS  
   g. Mentoring, coaching, tutoring  
   h. General labor - transportation  
   i. Other  

9. Have you taken on a position of leadership in your role as a volunteer? (Circle all that apply)
a. Mentor  
b. Fund raiser  
c. Marketing  
d. Treasurer  
e. Grant Writer  
f. Volunteer Coordinator  
g. Board Chair  
h. Events Planner  
i. Other

10. Have you had any recognition in your role as a volunteer? (Examples, article in agency newsletter, intranet or local paper, standing ovation, lunch, banner, thank you note, gift certificate, etc.)
   a. Yes
   b. No
(You can attach a resume or complete the form below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of CURRENT volunteer activities</th>
<th>Type of volunteer activities?</th>
<th>How long?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
THANK YOU! For taking the time to complete the form; your input is an important contribution to the study of senior African American volunteers.
Appendix C

Recruitment email to Volunteer Coordinator/Manager

Dear,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D program in Executive Leadership at the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College. I am in the process of writing my dissertation, and I am planning my research study for the Fall of 2011. In this regard, I'm asking for assistance in this project in identifying individuals who would be willing to participate in a focus group as described below. I am seeking retired African Americans who volunteer to participate in my program of study. I am looking for senior African American volunteers to assist me by participating in a focus group with their peers.

This study will utilize three distinct focus groups of volunteers from nonprofits. The groups will meet at St. John Fisher College in the Alesi building room 102. The three groups will each have 6 to 12 participants and will meet approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours.

These meetings will allow the participants to share their volunteer stories and experiences. The sessions will be recorded and transcribed. The information will be kept strictly confidential no data will be identifiable to a specific participant. An “alias” will be assigned to each participant, and no information that can identify any participants will be released.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Each participant will be asked to sign a consent form that allows his/her data to be used in the study, but any participant will have the option to drop out of the study at any point and not have his/her information used in the project.

Attached is a copy of the consent form and demographic survey. All participants will be asked to complete and return the forms in a self-addressed and stamped envelope that will be provided prior to their scheduled focus group session.

At this time, information on African American volunteerism is rare, and it is expected that this study will also provide the groundwork for increased recruiting and retention of African American senior volunteers. Your focus group will take place on ________________________.

Thank you in advance for your help. And, if you would like further information prior to contacting your volunteers, please do so either by email (mca01731@sjfc.edu) or phone 585-271-6757.

Sincerely,

Monique C. Adams
Doctoral Student
Appendix D

Five Protocol and Subgroup Questions

Focus Group Protocol Questions

1. How did you acquire the skills needed to volunteer for a particular organization?
   - What makes you good at your volunteer work?
   - What in your background contributes to your success as a volunteer?
   - Does anything limit your ability to volunteer as much as you like?
   - Do you feel you missed any opportunities to volunteer? Is so why?

2. How did you find out about volunteering?
   - From your social connections what kinds of referrals were you given for volunteer work?
   - What type of activities do you volunteer for?
   - Why do you continue to volunteer?

3. How do you feel about the quality of your volunteer work?
   - What values do you hold that volunteering helps you fulfill?
   - Why do you choose to volunteer for this organization over another?
   - Do you volunteer in another setting beside this and if so where?
   - What’s fulfilling about volunteering?

4. Before, we end our session, is there anything else you would like to tell me about volunteering?
### Appendix E

This table lists the differences between the groups

**Differences Between Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Groups B &amp; C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Low socioeconomic level</td>
<td>• High socioeconomic level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Forced caregiving responsibilities</td>
<td>• Conscientious giving back to the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Isolated from broader society</td>
<td>• Connected to broader society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community level volunteering</td>
<td>• Professional level volunteering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peer to peer mentoring people in the community who are less fortunate like themselves</td>
<td>• Collaborating with people in the board/organization room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Less educated</td>
<td>• Highly educated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Oppressed by circumstance</td>
<td>• Oppressed systemically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Took the initiative to become a volunteer</td>
<td>• Saturated asks from recruiters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lacks resources</td>
<td>• Has resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low skill set</td>
<td>• High skill set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limitations in ability to serve due to lack of resources, human, social and cultural capital</td>
<td>• Limitations to where they can provide their human, social, cultural capital due to organizational structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>Groups B &amp; C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lived the experience</td>
<td>• Witnessed to the experiences of those less fortunate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Giving back to others in the trenches what was given to them</td>
<td>• Passionate about serving those less fortunate; providing their service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning to become empowered</td>
<td>• Already empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of confidence</td>
<td>• Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trained to perform tasks</td>
<td>• Portability of skill sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• All females</td>
<td>• Both males and females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unknown leaders</td>
<td>• Recognized as community leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developed network support to reduce isolation and increase support</td>
<td>• SILOS and fragmented groups of support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>