# THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MILLENNIALS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

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"For our purpose is predetermined before our existence. Our job is to stay the course to fulfill what the Almighty placed within us in order to change the world for the better." – Dr. Kapreta Johnson

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# Abstract

The Volunteering Experiences of African American Millennials: An Exploratory Study

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Volunteering is an invaluable resource and practice that connects people to much-needed services. Current research is limited on the practices and perspectives of African American volunteers in the United States. Through the application of surveys, interviews, and focus groups, this qualitative study explores the volunteer experiences of African American millennials. Based on an in-depth review of the literature on volunteerism and social capital theory, this study addresses the following research questions: What are the experiences and expectations of African American millennials participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities? What are the challenges and limitations of participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities? What are the challenges and limitation of participating in non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities? And what are the benefits and opportunities of participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities? This study explores the social benefits and opportunities created through formal and informal volunteering and examines their implications by answering these questions.

This study finds that participating in employer-sponsored and non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities provides the ability to network for both professional and personal connections. Participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities provides access to opportunities for career advancement. Volunteering within the African American community in

non-employer sponsored activities is communal and familial in nature and motivated by personal interests and the level of impact of their service on communities. The benefits of volunteering obtained by the population group are consistent with the benefits found in the existing literature on volunteering. However, participating in formal volunteer activities were similar to the benefits received from participating in informal volunteer activities. Finally, challenges associated with volunteering include time limitations, the lack of a sense of belonging especially in employee-sponsored activities, and the existence of the savior complex.

This study recommends increased marketing and communication from nonprofit organizations regarding volunteering work and its impact, increased community inclusion and involvement in volunteer work, and an improved volunteer experience through well-organized or structured work. In addition, recommendations for employers that organize or sponsor volunteer efforts for their employees include a centralized location and method to sign-up for volunteer activities as well as sharing with employees the success of the volunteer day or activity. Examples include the number of employees who participated in the volunteer activity, the number of volunteer hours contributed and any success information obtained from the nonprofit that would show the impact of the volunteer participation. An additional recommendation for employers includes communicating to employees the benefits, both personal and professional, associated with volunteering which may include the possibility of promotion, networking opportunities, and the ability to learn new skills and mentor the next generation. Finally, this study recommends volunteers actively engage with nonprofit organizations to include following the organizations on social media, subscribing to the organization's newsletter or email notices, and utilizing networks and connections to discover additional ways to be more engaged.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Introduction

The culture of volunteering is somewhat commonplace within the United States and is not new within American culture. The act of volunteering, stemming from the desire to help a fellow neighbor, can be expressed in many ways for various reasons. Volunteering encompasses the provision of everyday necessities, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Also, volunteering includes providing complimentary grooming sessions for homeless people, giving blood to save a life, or building a home in partnership with a family in need of a safe place to live. Volunteering is ingrained in the culture within the United States. French historian Alexis de Tocqueville (Oesterle et al., 2004) praised the United States citizens for their ability to show concern and care for their fellow citizens. The welfare and provision of fundamental human rights and needs for people everywhere are significant concerns in the United States (U.S. Department of State, 2016). Through volunteering, citizens help those in need, develop opportunities for relationships, create an environment that fosters trust between citizens, and experience an increase in self-care and life discovery (Delgado & Staples, 2008; Gee & Payne-Sturges, 2004; Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013; Son & Wilson, 2012).

Historically, due to society's limitations of social interactions, people of color, including African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics, were not included in opportunities for formal volunteering. Putnam (2000) described that formal volunteer groups such as clubs, churches, unions, and political groups were highly segregated, isolated, and restrictive. Recent data shows that people of color were less involved in formal volunteering efforts than white Americans (Smith et al., 2016). Among the generations within the United States, millennials of color (ages

24-39) are the least involved in formal volunteer efforts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). African Americans experienced fluctuations informal volunteer efforts between 2011-2015.

Between October 2014 – September 2015, about 24.9% of the adult American population, or 62.6 million Americans, performed 7.9 billion hours of volunteer service, totaling an estimated $184 billion (Smith et al., 2016). Of those who volunteered in 2014-2015, 24% of the volunteers identified as African American or Black, 23% identified as Asian, 20% identified as Hispanic, and 33% identified as White (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Also, based on data released in 2016, millennials of color, which include African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics ages 25-39, volunteered the least, with 22.3% of volunteers being between the ages of 25-34 and 28.9% of volunteers being between the ages 35-44 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

**Statement of Problem**

Current literature provides data on the benefits of volunteering, the types of volunteering, and the impact of volunteering (Smith et al., 2016). A gap in research exists exploring the formal volunteer experience of people of color, precisely that of millennials between ages 24-39, and the benefits and challenges of volunteering among this population group (Carter & Marx, 2016; Clafton et al., 2014). As volunteer service programs mull over the territory of volunteer retention (Smith et al., 2016), identifying the influences and motivations towards participation in formal volunteer opportunities is crucial to organization sustainability (Smith et al., 2016). Without a surplus of new volunteers, volunteer service programs will suffer from the decline of aging volunteers.

**Research Questions**

Through social capital theory and narrative inquiry, this research will explore the personal volunteer experiences of African American millennials, ages 24-39, employed by organizations that sponsor team volunteer opportunities with service agencies. The researcher will examine the volunteer experience of African American millennials and their decision to participate in future volunteer efforts, perception towards volunteering, benefits experienced from volunteering, and the challenges and limitations associated with participating in formal volunteer efforts within these organizations and agencies.

The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. What are the experiences and expectations of African American millennials that participate in formal volunteering opportunities?
2. What are the challenges and limitations experienced by African American millennials participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities?
3. What are the challenges and limitations experienced by African American millennials participating in non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities?
4. What are the social benefits and opportunities created through formal volunteering experiences? What are its implications?

**Significance of the Study**

The potential significance of this study will be its ability to inform organizational cultures and policies that impact the volunteer experience of African American millennials, particularly the recruitment and retention methods to increase volunteerism among African American millennials. Inclusive volunteering is available to anyone regardless of age, culture, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or social status (Volunteer Scotland, n.d.). The creation of

inclusive volunteer opportunities might aid in the sustainability of organizations and strengthen communities (UN Volunteers, 2014). This research's expected additional theoretical contribution will be its insight into the expectations, experiences, benefits, and limitations leading to African American millennials' participation in formal volunteer efforts. In addition, the validation of existing claims surrounding the benefits of volunteering to determine if such benefits are cross-cultural and cross-generational.

**Limitations**

Volunteering is commonplace and includes formal and informal acts of service performed by individuals of varying ages. Such acts of service include non-group-initiated volunteer activities, service-learning volunteering, voluntourism, and community service. However, due to the focus of this research, only African American millennials, age 24-39, employed by an organization that sponsors employee-involved volunteer projects with service agencies will be considered. Non-group-initiated volunteer activities, service-learning volunteering, voluntourism, and community service are excluded from this research study.

**Potential Implications**

This research study will explore the volunteer experiences of African American millennials employed by organizations that sponsor employee-involved volunteer opportunities with service agencies. Potential implications of this study could be to improve the experience of African American millennial volunteers and, by extension, increase the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations and service agencies. In addition, it might indirectly impact the organization’s sustainability efforts. An exploration of whether formal volunteering is inclusive

and allows anyone, regardless of ethnicity or age, to gain access and reap the associated benefits will also be explored.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## History of Volunteering

For Americans living in the United States, volunteering is a way of life performed out of both obligation and free will and is considered a pathway to promotion and connections (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). According to Snyder and Omoto (2008), volunteering is both the magnetic wave that attracts people of different backgrounds, economic statuses, cultural identities to connect and the bonding agent that holds our diverse communities together.

Within the United States, the history of volunteering is rich and long. From women serving families affected by wars to activists pursuing social change for the greater good, volunteering is more prevalent within the United States than in any other country (Putnam, 2000). French historian Alexis de Tocqueville praised the United States for being a nation comprised of persons directly involved in the life of their communities, public and private (Oesterle et al., 2004), and individuals who resisted the temptation to cheat or take advantage of their neighbor (Putnam, 2000).

The notion of public and private community involvement or helping and service to others is what many consider the rudiments of volunteering (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Such rudiments have allowed nonprofit and volunteer organizations to provide needed services to citizens, once the responsibility of government organizations (Petrzelka & Mannon, 2006).

Traditionally, volunteering within the United States has been considered a helping role or the work of women, not that of men (Petrzelka & Mannon, 2006). Research from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) supported this claim by Petrzelka and Mannon (2006) and showed that women volunteered at a higher rate than men. Petrzelka and Mannon (2006) also provided

insight into these data results because women view their volunteer work as equally important as their other responsibilities. However, volunteering is not exclusive to the United States as acts of volunteering by men and women can be witnessed worldwide (Omoto & Snyder, 2002).

**Volunteering Defined**

The term volunteering has evolved from distributing daily provisions such as milk and bread to those in need to encompass dreams and desires of a better world fostered by Americans and all human beings around the globe (Musick & Wilson, 2008). The acts and definitions of volunteering have evolved. Kilpatrick (2007) believed that volunteering includes service work in addition to a financial donation or supplying goods that occur over time and is absent of compensation. Liu et al. (2017) drew from scholars and practitioners in their definition of volunteering. They suggested that volunteering includes giving of one's time or talent with no financial compensation. Wilson (2012) defined volunteering as any activity without the expectation of monetary payment that benefits another cause, group, organization, or person. Ellis and Noyes (1990) suggested that volunteering is the choice to respond to a need without concern for monetary profit. Van Til (1988) defined volunteering as a concerted helping action that others consider valuable but not mandated. Musick and Wilson (2008) identified volunteering as work done outside the home in an organizational setting. Smith et al. (2016) took a more detailed approach in their definition of volunteering and defined it as such:

> As any activity of any individual, alone or with others, as a solitary act or as a member of some informal group or formal organization, that is performed without compulsion/coercion and mainly without direct remuneration/payment that directly or indirectly attempts to improve the satisfaction and quality of life or one

> or more others outside the boundaries of the immediate family and household (Smith, 2016, p. 4)

It is imperative to note that there are two forms of volunteering: formal volunteering and informal volunteering. Musick and Wilson (2008) defined formal volunteering as assistance provided to or associated with an organization. According to Musick and Wilson (2008), informal volunteering is informal helping, which is also unpaid service provided to someone outside of the organizational context in a more casual setting. Einolf et al. (2016) agreed that informal volunteering is unpaid work but further defined it as volunteer efforts "not coordinated by an organization or institution" (p. 223). According to Putnam (2000), formal volunteering entails community-centered projects, and informal volunteering is individualistic actions such as giving blood or donating to a charity.

United States scholar Harriett Naylor (Ellis, 2000) in 1970 coined the term volunteerism, the study of voluntary associations and nonprofit organizations (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p.18). However, just as volunteering has evolved, so has the term volunteerism, with volunteerism sometimes used interchangeably with volunteering. Having the desire to create a universal definition of volunteerism, the United Nations Volunteers reported that the United Kingdom's Inter-Parliamentary Council ruled that the definition of volunteerism should be based on local, social, and cultural values (Liu et al., 2017). Volunteering will vary depending on the circumstances surrounding the acts performed, the location, and social and cultural values in play.

To conceptualize volunteerism, Synder and Omoto (2008) provided six characteristics of volunteerism:

(1) “The actions of volunteers must be voluntary.

(2) the act of volunteering involves some deliberation or decision making; they are not reflexive acts of assistance or ‘emergency helping.’

(3) volunteer activities must be delivered over a period of time.

(4) the decision to volunteers is based entirely on the person’s own goals without the expectation of reward or punishment.

(5) volunteering involves serving people or causes who desire help; and

(6) volunteerism is performed on behalf of people or causes” (p. 2).

Understood in the most basic terms as a person choosing to help someone in need (Omoto & Snyder, 2012) to a more detailed understanding of a shared effort to bring about change that benefits a disadvantaged minority group (Thomas et al., 2017), the definition of volunteering is as diverse as the groups seeking to study it.

For the sake of this research study, we apply Smith's (2016) definition and define volunteering as any unpaid act of benevolence performed by an individual towards someone of non-relation regardless of age and ethnicity that directly or indirectly attempts to improve the quality of life. We further define formal volunteering as assistance provided to or in association with an organization towards persons of non-relation that transcends age and ethnicity that directly or indirectly attempts to improve quality of life (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Smith, 2016). The population of focus for this research is African American millennials' participation within formal volunteering.

**Types of Volunteering**

Scholars (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Smith et al., 2016) have determined that two forms of volunteering exist: informal and formal. Smith et al. (2016) defined informal volunteering as volunteer participation by individuals "not acting as members of any organized group" (p. 3) and formal volunteering as "do as members of some group or organization (p. 3). Smith et al. (2016) expounded further on formal volunteering and stated that formal volunteering occurs within membership associations and volunteer service programs. Membership associations consist of individuals who have voting control over the actions and direction of the group whereas, volunteer service programs are typically departments within larger organizations that employ volunteers to help achieve the organization's goals (Smith et al., 2016). Within volunteer service programs, volunteers do not have any authority or voting rights regarding the organization's direction (Smith et al., 2016). There are seven particular types of volunteering. Types included: informal, unorganized volunteering, stipend/ paid transnational volunteering, stipend national service volunteering, volunteer tourism and travel volunteering, online and virtual volunteering, spontaneous volunteering in emergencies, and formal volunteer service programs (Smith et al., 2016). This research will focus on formal volunteer service programs as defined by Smith et al. (2016).

**Historical Context of Volunteering in the United States**

Volunteering within the United States was the hallmark of many communities and applauded by political figures to include U.S. Presidents. In 1984, President and First Lady Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter began volunteering with Habitat for Humanity. This nonprofit organization utilizes volunteers to build affordable homes to help eradicate poor living conditions. Since 1984, President and Mrs. Carter have partnered with Habitat for Humanity

annually to lead a group of volunteers in building homes for those in need both nationally and globally (Habitat for Humanity). In his 1989 inaugural address, President George H.W. Bush shared his vision of a "thousand points of light," inviting citizens of the United States to volunteer and make a difference in the lives of others, their communities, and the nation. President George H.W. Bush followed up with this vision a year later by establishing and awarding the "Daily Point of Light Award," an annual award presented to citizens making a difference (Points of Light, 2019).

However, until the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, people of color were limited in participating in many opportunities for formal volunteering (Glaude, 2016). Putnam (2000) described that formal volunteer groups such as clubs, churches, unions, and political groups were highly segregated, isolated, and restrictive during this time. However, this did not stop communities of color from performing charitable deeds within their communities and for their neighbors. Such exclusions became the impetus for communities forced to volunteer in untraditional formal or informal methods not formally recognized by society. Efforts include supporting family and friends and assisting neighbors in volunteer activities not organized, orchestrated, or funded by an established charitable mainstream organization but with organizations such as the Black Panther Party (Rivera, 2008).

The Black Panther Party was founded in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, a prominent influencer of untraditional volunteering in African American communities. Although primarily known for its stance against police violence, the organization lauded protection through programs for citizens (Bassett, 2016). Such programming included free health clinics, ambulance services, complimentary breakfast for school children, free clothing, and a housing

program (Hilliard, 2008). The organization's influence on the churches within those communities and political organizations aimed to create an even playing field and was committed to the idea of social equity and providing for the underprivileged (Rivera, 2008).

Today, volunteering is not limited to involvement with registered nonprofit and community organizations. It includes formal acts of volunteering with organizations such as the American Heart Association, Habitat for Humanity, and the American Red Cross. It incorporates informal acts of volunteering, including driving a neighbor to the store (Musick & Wilson (2008). Putnam (2000) identified three categories for nonprofit organizations: community-based, church-based, and work-based. These organizations were established for various purposes. Such purposes include the desire to change communities for the better, fill the gap for what is missing in communities, and help strengthen communities (Omoto & Snyder, 2002).

Volunteering is also a mixture of acts of benevolence stemming from its roots, such as assisting those impacted by the effect of war (Putnam, 2000) to new forms of volunteering. Such examples include annual volunteer days organized by colleges and universities such as “The Big Event” hosted by the University of Texas at Arlington (UT Arlington) and companies’ and organizations’ year-long community engagement such as *Impact Day* sponsored by Deloitte (Deloitte).

**Motivations for Volunteering**

The act of volunteering takes on many forms and is a common way of giving back. Using this perspective of reciprocity, helping others, and supporting causes that ignite individual passions provides physical and mental benefits to volunteers while offering opportunities for

community involvement (Stukas et al., 2016). However, just as the volunteering opportunities vary, so do the reasons a person chooses to volunteer.

There are many reasons why a person chooses to volunteer, with whom they volunteer, and the personal and altruistic benefit(s) received through volunteering (Pearce, 1993; Prouteau & Wolf, 2003). Musick and Wilson (2008) reported that such reasons include care for their community, care for the world, and concern for the well-being of others. People volunteer to fulfill the desire to meet new people, increase social connections, and build social capital (Putnam, 2000). Acts of volunteering occur due to intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Menchik and Weisbrod (1987). Intrinsic motivations are internal rewards and feelings felt by volunteers for helping those in need and involves no material reward (Meier & Stutzer, 2008). Meier and Stutzer (2008) also considered volunteering as an investment where payment is an extrinsic motivator. Erez et al. (2008) argued that volunteering is due to the innate need for humans to be in proximity to others and support others. Meier and Stutzer (2008) concluded that there is no clear distinction as to what motivates people to volunteer but that volunteering is a combination of values and rewards.

Religious institutions are proponents of volunteering and encourage their parishioners to volunteer (Ozorak, 1989). According to Whitaker (2012) and Semien (2007), volunteering is ingrained within religious involvement in the United States, and followers are encouraged to aid those defenseless and helpless. Whitaker (2012) and Semien (2007) further stated that Protestants in western societies base their need to help others on biblical verses and expect acts of benevolence as a part of their faith.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), 33.1% of volunteers performed volunteer services with a religious organization. However, over the years, many people have substituted volunteering within their broader communities for performing their acts of benevolence within the four walls of the religious organization that they most identify with (Putnam, 2000). As a result, interaction among volunteers was limited to pre-established silos within the self-contained religious communities.

Einolf (2016) believed that volunteering is a learned behavior modeled through acts of benevolence witnessed by the volunteer. Drezner (2010) argued that children who volunteer internalize the positive feedback received from volunteering, thereby repeating acts of charity as adults. Einolf (2016) further explained that childhood participation in volunteer activities with religious, community, and school-based organizations lead to volunteering in adulthood. Arnold (2017) stated that volunteering is perceived as a principle to guide life to some. As a result, volunteering is a learned behavior that, if introduced during childhood years, becomes an activity that produces positive feelings when performed in adulthood.

Millennials have impacted volunteering in the United States in several capacities. According to Ertas (2016), culture and societal events also affect personal values and, in turn, impact the reasons for which a person chooses to volunteer. For example, the 2010 Corporation for National and Community Service Volunteering report revealed that millennials volunteered for mentoring and tutoring youth at higher rates than other generations and volunteered less with religious institutions (Ertas, 2016). In addition, Nisbett and Strzelecka (2017) argued that millennials participate in conservation volunteer opportunities for the travel adventure and bragging rights afforded. Callanan and Thomas (2005) provided further insight and state that

other motives include personal interests, location, duration, and qualification of the volunteer project and the impact on the local community. Benson and Seibert (2011) continued the discussion. They argued that motives also include the opportunity to experience something different, meet other volunteers, including international volunteers, learn about other cultures, and live in another country. Ertas (2016) and Stukas et al. (2016) argued that people volunteer in the areas and places that fulfill their motivations and goals.

**The Impact and Benefits of Volunteering**

The need for volunteering stemmed, in part, from the desire to assist the government in supplying the needs of its citizens (Petrzelka & Mannon, 2006). Synder and Omoto (2008) indicated that volunteering is a way individuals and groups attempt to address social problems hindering the function of society. Meier and Stutzer (2008) also claimed that community service organizations exist because of the free labor provided by volunteers, and charitable organizations depend on volunteers to fulfill the agency's mission and reduce operational costs. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service (2018), 77.34 million Americans, or 30.3% percent of the American population) volunteered at or for a nonprofit organization in 2017, equating to $167 billion in economic value.

Volunteering is a phenomenon surrounded by curiosity (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). It creates a relationship cycle inclusive of offering and receiving help (Synder & Omoto, 2008), performing an unnecessary or extra step (Chapman, 2008), or performing a meaningful act of charity for community service, leisure, or social engagement (Liu et al., 2017). Due, in part, to the complexity in terms of its definition and scope of work. However, volunteering is a vital component within communities and social and professional networks (Liu et al., 2017). In

addition, volunteering aids distributing social services and consumer needs (Liu et al., 2017). Putnam (2000) also asserted that volunteering and informal volunteering foster additional volunteering and social interaction. Therefore, not only is volunteering a form of helping (Snyder & Omoto, 2008), but it is also a remedy for several social and personal deficiencies.

According to scholars, volunteering provides many benefits that include:

(1) Closing the gap in services, programs, and development projects for individuals and communities (Synder & Omoto, 2008),
(2) Maintaining both the social and economic vitality within communities (Petrzelka & Mannon, 2006),
(3) Responding to natural disasters and other unanticipated events (Snyder & Omoto, 2008),
(4) Creating, expressing, strengthening, and dealing with identity issues, especial that of personal identity (Thomas et al., 2017; Wilson, 2012),
(5) Stimulating political change (Synder & Omoto, 2008),
(6) Fostering an environment whereby the social needs of all persons within a community are satisfied (Lai et al., 2012),
(7) Increasing positive attributes such as self-esteem and self-confidence (Stukas et al., 2016) as well as a state of happiness (Borgonovi, 2008).

According to Snyder and Omoto (2008), the importance and benefits of volunteering include providing services to individuals in need and producing better health, a greater sense of optimism, and ultimately a more extended life for the volunteer. Putnam (2000) and Stukas et al.

(2016) praised volunteering for its positive impact on individual well-being and connection to the community (Snyder & Omoto, 2008).

According to Son and Wilson (2012), the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) identified the benefits of volunteering and promoted volunteerism among citizens who volunteer. According to this report by CNCS, volunteering provides meaning and purpose to the lives of those who volunteer while also decreasing the impact of isolation during painful periods in life (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007). Such interactions foster relationships with persons who otherwise might live in isolation during painful periods in life.

Stukas et al. (2016) argued that volunteering creates opportunities that provide career and organizational benefits for both the volunteer and the organization. Pilivan (2010) and Thoits and Hewitt (2001) stated that volunteering increases health benefits, especially for older adults. Pilivan (2010) and Pilivan and Siegl (2007) believed that volunteering improves psychological well-being. Other benefits include an increase in social connectedness (Putnam, 2000), positive effects on the volunteer's well-being and self-esteem (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001), the building of trust within communities (Greenberg, 2001; Musick & Wilson, 2008), lower rates of mortality (Borgonovi, 2008), as well as an increase in happiness and a decrease in depression (Borgonovi, 2008). Chan et al. (2014) attributed adolescent involvement in volunteering with educational attainment, additional civic participation, higher life satisfaction, and lower arrest rates in adulthood.

Donning the ability to create opportunities to establish connections among citizens (Townsend et al., 2012), many scholars view and accept the notion that volunteering creates

opportunities for relationships (Delgado & Staples, 2008; Gee & Payne-Sturges, 2004; Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013). Also, social connections obtained through volunteering provide access to information, pooled labor, and trust (Forbes & Zampelli, 2012). Townsend et al. (2012) further argued that the opportunity for connections through volunteering supports the notion that community trust is developed through volunteerism.

A 2012 study conducted by Townsend et al. revealed three personal benefits of volunteering: confidence, capabilities, and connections. This opportunity for relationships supports the notion that trust within society is developed through volunteerism. If trust within society correlates with volunteerism, do African American millennials share the benefits of volunteering that researchers claim? Chan et al. (2014) identified attributes of persons who volunteer that include emersion into a circle of inclusion that includes trust. Within that circle is the sense of belonging. In addition, social connectedness increases trust in a person's identity, and individuals become known within their community and dispel harmful stereotypes applied by society (Gross & Hardin, 2010; Reutter et al., 2009; Seaton et al., 2008; Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013).

Through the ongoing relationship of identity, as determined by those with whom one volunteer, connections fostered, and levels of trust created can be strengthened and maintained within a community. This research borrows from Delgado and Stefancic (2017). They argued that experiences, perspectives, viewpoints, and stories from everyday life provide a greater understanding of race viewed by Americans, specifically related to people in the United States. This research seeks to explore the factors that influence participation in company-sponsored

volunteer efforts by African American Millennials, ages 24-39, and the benefits associated with such acts of engagement.

**The Downside of Volunteering**

It is not refutable that volunteering includes benefits such as opportunities to meet new people, increasing social connections, building social capital, and the chance to help someone in need (Liu et al., 2017; Putnam, 2000; Synder & Omoto, 2008). However, volunteer efforts are not without consequences. According to Prince and Brown (2016), volunteer practices can render repercussions, including ethical issues, in areas where resources and work are limited. The result of such incidents includes volunteers removing the opportunity for residents to learn a skill or trade and increasing the inability for local citizens to be gainfully employed.

Costello (2018) also argued that volunteering outside of the United States allows for the presumption that American volunteers are more competent and further reduces the opportunity for local citizens in countries outside of the United States to gain skills or increase their employability. Opportunities that involve Americans volunteering in other countries may come from the American volunteer adopting a rescuer or savior's mentality to assist and develop what scholars coin the white savior industrial complex. According to Bex and Craps (2016), the white savior industrial complex arises when Americans, or people of European descent, view their act of kindness or humanitarianism as the right thing to do because it provides an emotional experience that validates their privilege as an American.

Other challenges to volunteering include lack of funding for volunteers to include volunteer management, increasing demands for volunteer opportunities, duplication of volunteer and paid staff roles, and volunteer burn-out. Other disagreeable side-effects include stress and a

shift in traditional volunteer roles where volunteering is a lifelong commitment to new roles where volunteering is more episodic and driven by the need for autonomy and freedom (Smith et al., 2016).

**Volunteerism and African Americans**

Within the United States, inclusion into formal volunteering groups was unavailable and unimaginable to African Americans for part of this country's history. According to Glaude (2016), mainstream or white society never intended African Americans to be active participants. Ideals such as freedom and equality, liberty, and citizenship did not apply to African Americans within the United States (Glaude, 2016). As a result, influencers of untraditional volunteering in communities where people lived, the churches within those communities, and political organizations aimed at creating an even playing field for their ethnicities and cultures arose (Rivera, 2008). For example, the Black Panther Party, founded in 1966, was committed to social equity and providing for the underprivileged, specifically African Americans (Rivera, 2008).

With changes in time, volunteer opportunities have become more visible. Organizations such as BMe (pronounced Be Me) and Black Girls Rock have increased the visibility, engagement, and volunteer efforts of minority youth and millennials of color within communities to establish identity and expand the volunteer opportunities within and outside of one's community. The BMe Community, pronounced Be Me, believes that all human family members should be valued. In addition, the organization believes that black males should be viewed as assets, narratives that vilify and degrade men of color should be rejected. Society should work together to build a healthier community (BMe, 2016). The mission of the Black Girls Rock organization is to change the world through the empowerment of black girls and the ways

women of color are portrayed in the media in their roles as leaders and innovators and through service to others (Black Girls Rock, 2016). As these organizations teach empowerment and shine a light on the volunteer efforts of African American millennials, leaders face the reality of teaching volunteers, the organizations with whom they volunteer, and those for whom their services are directed, the importance of the need for community interaction.

In a 2016 report, the National Center for Charitable Statistics showed over 1.5 million registered nonprofit organizations in the United States. The 2016 Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 62.6 million Americans volunteered between September 2014 and September 2015. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service (2018), 77.34 million Americans volunteered for a nonprofit organization within the United States in 2017. Of those who volunteered in 2014-2015, 24% of the volunteers identified as African American or Black, 23% identified as Asian, 20% identified as Hispanic, and 33% identified as White (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Data is not available on the ethnicity of the 77.34 million Americans who volunteered in 2017. However, based on data released in 2016, millennials of color were the which includes African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics ages 25-39, volunteered the least, with 22.3% of volunteers being between the ages of 25-34 and 28.9% of volunteers being between the ages 35-44 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). In addition, the 2017 volunteer report from the Corporation for National and Community Service revealed that 80.8% of African Americans do not belong to any groups, organizations, or associations. 79% of millennials do not belong to any groups, organizations, or associations. Volunteering with religious organizations ranked the highest among African Americans and millennials, 40.4%, and 24.9% respectably, than any other volunteer organization category. This information provides insight into the networks and

groups African American millennials belong to and formal volunteer activity performed by this population group.

The urgency for millennials to become more visible within volunteering is not limited to their interaction within society. Nonprofit organizations stand to benefit from this population group's increase in volunteering. As baby boomers retire and make transitions in life, nonprofit organizations' manual labor and financial support will fall on millennials. For nonprofit organizations to achieve sustainability within their organizations and programs, engagement of this population group is not only necessary but vital.

**Millennial Volunteers**

Millennials are born between 1980 and 1995 (Foot & Stoffman, 1998; Johnson & Ng, 2016; Ng & Johnson, 2015) and are children of Baby Boomers and Generation X (Ertas, 2016). Millennials were coined by William Strauss and Neil Howe about the population group's birth around 2000 and their use of social media (Hoffman, 2017). This generation is also known as Gen Y, Nexus Generation, and Gen Me (Ng & Johnson, 2015). Millennials are the first generation raised with the internet and social networking platforms (Twenge, 2013). As a result, millennials' life events and most memorable moments include social networking (Ertas, 2016).

Characterized as the *social media generation* (Cannon & Mackay, 2017, p. 306), millennials are described as self-absorbed, entitled, and narcissistic (Johnson & Ng, 2016); materialistic (Ertas, 2016); and sheltered because of safety devices and rules (Kowske et al., 2010; Ray, 2013). Ray (2013) argued that such perception is because of millennials' special treatment and importance. Ng and Johnson (2015) further stated that divorce rates, women in the workforce, and rapid technological advances heavily influenced millennials' upbringing. Ng and

Johnson (2015) also attributed that millennials' upbringing in a middle-class environment contributes to the generation being seen as entitled.

According to Kowske et al. (2010), the self-inflated identity placed on millennials is due to the society into which they were born. As with every new generation, the newcomers react to their environment and establish an identity unique to their environment. Millennials are confident, full of promise for themselves and the future, optimistic, and vital (Kowske et al., 2010). Millennials are ethnoculturally diverse and egalitarian towards minority groups. In addition, this population group is selective in the cities where they live and work and reward more often for participation than performance (Ng & Johnson, 2015). Millennials' ability to overshare information is an advantage that allows for an openness that fosters community (Ray, 2013).

As a unique group comprised of ages between 24-39 (Johnson & Ng, 2016), volunteer activities for millennials differ from that of youth and senior volunteering (Ng & Johnson, 2015; Smith et al., 2016). For millennial parents, volunteering involves the family (Smith et al., 2016). Other areas of volunteer interests include service volunteering among college students (Einolf, 2016), volunteer travelers – tourists who volunteer while on vacation (Nisbett et al., 2017), as well as community work and concern for others (Mechler, 2013).

With prescribed absorbed and entitled characteristics, millennials are also socially conscious and commit acts dedicated to helping others and solving problems worldwide (Ertas, 2016). Research conducted by Ertas (2016) found that in comparison to other generations, millennials volunteer the most in areas such as mentoring and tutoring but volunteered less for

religious organizations. As the next generation, Generation Z, comes on the scene, Kowske et al. (2010) regarded millennials as full of life and promise for society and the future as we know it.

**Volunteerism and Gender**

Research surrounding the influence and impact gender has on volunteering has been studied in sociological literature, with scholars agreeing that gender segregation within volunteer works mimics evidence found in both the marketplace and labor force (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1982; Popielarz, 1999; Rotolo & Wilson, 2007; Wemlinger & Berlan, 2016).

According to Negrey (1993), society viewed volunteering as the role of women, a continuation of their duties in society as wives and mothers. According to Wemlinger and Berlan (2016), traditional gender roles play a part in organizations and activities women choose to volunteer. Eagly and Crowley (1986) and Karniol et al. (2003) explained and stated that women have more helping tendencies and have an *ethic of care* suitable for volunteering. According to Einolf (2011), social norms also aid in selecting volunteer activities performed by women.

Taniguchi (2006) further argued that the traditional role of men is to be breadwinners, which limits the number of times men have to volunteer. In addition, the type of volunteer activities performed by men and women echoed their societal roles in that women were more likely to perform volunteer activities such as preparing food (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009; Rotolo & Wilson, 2007) or serving with religious groups or human services and educational organizations (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Whereas men's volunteer activities include building and maintenance, board service (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009; Rotolo & Wilson, 2007), fire and rescue volunteer groups (Einolf, 2011), or sports and recreation (Musick & Wilson, 2008).

However, “research regarding whether men or women volunteer more has yielded mixed results” (Wemlinger & Berlan, 2016, p. 857). According to Einolf (2011), little research exists regarding why men and women participate in particular volunteer activities. Motivation and limitations for volunteering may vary and includes influence from social norms (Einolf, 2011; Fyall & Gazley, 2015), geographic location (Fyall & Gazley, 2015), as well as the need for and benefits of social capital (Einolf, 2011).

**Volunteerism and Trust**

Through volunteering, citizens develop relationships with and foster trust between their fellow citizens (Gross & Hardin, 2010; Reutter et al., 2009; Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013; Seaton et al., 2008). At its core, trust is relational in that it occurs between people and transactional in that it can be given, requested, denied, and revoked (Skinner et al., 2014). According to Luhmann (1979, 2000), trust helps reduce the complexity found throughout society in that it helps individuals understand each other and create a better functioning society. Skinner et al. (2014) described trust as a social resource that is vital to social interactions.

Trust is vital in volunteering. Research shows that through volunteering, relationships are established, and trust is strengthened (Delgado & Staples, 2008; Gee & Payne-Sturges, 2004; Son & Wilson, 2012; Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013). Fukuyama (1996; 2001) argued that without trust, individuals would continuously be attempting to make complex decisions regarding handling the issues of life such as the use of a babysitter, ask a neighbor to keep an eye on their home while they are away, or the sincerity of a stranger’s courtesy in passing. Putnam (2000) believes that individuals, nations, neighborhoods, and businesses flourish where trust is present. Luhmann (1979, 2000) added that not only does trust help reduce the complexity of life and that

of society, in general, but its trust also allows society to handle issues of distrust within certain groups strategically and foster a better functioning society. Through this ongoing relationship of identity and connectivity fostered by volunteerism, trust is strengthened and maintained within a community.

However, some scholars believe that trust is approached with caution. Under the guise that trust is obtained via a process, some scholars warn of the dangers of distributed trust without due process and believe that trust results from social interactions (Skinner et al., 2014). Govier (1997, 1998) reminded readers that trust is not faith; therefore, givers of trust should not be blind in their trust distribution. Hobbesian (Ward et al., 2014) furthers this warning by arguing that relationships, as we know them, contain a level of distrust because competition, greed, and suspicion are the foundation. As a result, scholars have varying opinions regarding building trust and its importance among individuals. Govier (1997; 1998) recognized that although trust should be the default position in our relationships philosophically, trust should not be given simply because of a feeling.

In their argument that trust is a process, Skinner et al. (2014) believed that giving and gaining trust is riddled with emotions and values that are powerful and positive, while distrust, on the other hand, is a process that involves negative emotions. Gambetta (1988) and McAllister (1997) long advised of the perils of misattributed trust and argued that persons who trust are susceptible to manipulation and abuse. Putnam (2000), however, advocates that distrust is not purely objective and involves, to an extent, one is dishonest proclivities and inclinations. Thus, a person is as trusting of others as they are of themselves.

***Definition of Trust.*** As a sociological and psychological idea, trust has various meanings, and interpretations are displayed in many ways (Govier, 1997, 1998). Scholars have therefore developed several definitions for the word trust. According to Krueger et al. (2007), trust is the common element that allows individuals to interact. Krueger et al. (2007) further explained that strangers could meet and develop reciprocal relationships through trust. No matter the definition used, it is generally accepted that trust, although intangible, is excellent and beneficial to everyone (Skinner et al., 2014). Ward et al. (2014) defined trust as a mutual agreement between two or more persons, whereby neither person involved in a transaction will exploit the other person's vulnerability (s).

For this study, in its attempt to examine the role of trust in the formal volunteer experience of African American millennials, we employ the definition of trust as defined by Ward et al. (2014) as a mutual understanding that neither person will exploit the vulnerability of the other.

***Types of Trust.*** Before delving into the different types of trust, there is a difference between trust and trustworthiness. Trust, as defined earlier, is the mutual agreement that neither person involved in a transaction will exploit the vulnerability of the other person(s) (Ward et al., 2014). Conversely, trustworthiness is the level on which an individual can be trusted (Glaeser et al., 2000). As the degree of trustworthiness increases, so does opportunities for engagement and interaction (Glaeser et al., 2000). Putnam (2000) expands this view of trustworthiness and argues that trustworthiness is a lubricant for social life. Through interaction that occurs frequently, a diverse group of people can produce a generalized norm of reciprocity.

Krueger et al. (2007) identified two types of trust: conditional and unconditional. Conditional trust is when at least one person in the relationship or social exchange, whether personal, business, or political, has displayed that their intentions and actions prove self-serving. This type of behavior creates an imbalance in the relationship's benevolence, goodwill, or common good. As a result, the person who displays such characteristics is given conditional trust by others in the relationship (Krueger et al., 2007). However, unconditional trust results from all persons in the relationship, or social exchange, proving trustworthy and showing balanced benevolence, goodwill, and common good consistently between all persons involved (Krueger et al., 2007).

***The Building, Developing, and Strengthening of Trust.*** As with any principle, trust is strengthened over time. Within a relationship, trust is conditional and gets stronger over time as dependency, consistency, intentions, and values are shown, thus decreasing the level of risk associated with the social exchange between persons involved (Krueger et al., 2007). Putnam (2000) claimed that trust is built over time through person-to-person interaction. Fukuyama (1996, 2001) believed that trust increases as persons within a community, or relationship, share the same values that create expectations where each exhibits honesty in their behavior. Ward (2014) also believes that social and cultural norms assist in whether a person decides to trust a stranger. Through these social and cultural norms, a person learns to trust based on characteristics and societal notions about receiving trust. Fukuyama (1996, 2001) reiterated that communities, families, groups with solid internal ties would have weak external ties and, as a result, would produce a lack of trust towards those that are outside of the community, family, and group (Ward, 2014).

Opposed to the idea that trust develops as a result of life experiences with others (Giddens, 1994, 1990), Ward (2014) argued that trust is not something that occurs by happenstance and should not be the result of rational thinking or prior experience. Govier (1997, 1998) furthered Ward's (2014) argument that trust is not blind faith and precautions should be taken that do not cause trust without due diligence and careful consideration of the person trusted.

Ward (2014) and Govier's (1997, 1998) stance on the treatment of trust connected to the idea argued by Hobbesian (Ward 2014) that shared experiences and interactions between humans are clouded by things such as suspicion, greed, and competition. As a result, distrust is the default position within human nature. Govier (1997, 1998) reiterated that trust should be the default position of humans; however, trust should be given to those who prove to be trustworthy.

**Technology and Volunteering**

Just as volunteering in America has evolved, technology within the United States has also changed. As history shows, technology can be good; it can revitalize small and inaccessible towns and increase information sharing worldwide. However, a drawback of technological advancement is that it can also limit human interaction (Putnam, 2000). Volunteering has changed and will continue to change. Hoffman (2017) provided a valid point in that although volunteering has historically been a way for individuals to bond and create stronger communities, social media has expanded what is considered community. With technological advancements and the ability to live stream any encounter, the face of volunteering is changing because the world surrounding volunteering has changed.

Being inclusive of social networks laden with established norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness (Putnam & Feldstein, 2004), society benefits from the relationships built, fostered, and maintained through personal interactions. As time and data have revealed, personal interactions are not the same as 50 years ago (Putnam, 2000). Technology has changed the way people communicate, where they work, the method and frequency of socializing, and the general acceptance of tolerability. Communities have changed, neighborhoods diversified, and family structures have evolved. As technology began to drive interactions between people, the communities in which people lived and worked began to change.

Physical communities force individuals to live with and interact with people different from them in many ways (Putnam, 2000). Much like physical communities, the sense of community created by technology can limit communication between people based on interests (Putnam, 2000). However, Putnam (2000) argued that physical communities require establishing life among people who have differences and forces diversity, unlike virtual communities. As a result, relationships built-in physical communities are more bounded and have developed over time, whereas those found in virtual communities are less bounded and more fluid (Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000) made clear that the Internet is not merely a form of technology, nor is it the cause of the decline in volunteering. Still, it is a mode in which people communicate with each other, and it can be a positive tool for interaction if appropriately used. Putnam (2000) furthered argues that the Internet can not only displace, but it can also strengthen face-to-face interactions.

According to Bers and Chau (2006), the Internet creates community and engages in volunteer efforts among the youth, among other things. As formal volunteering declines (Putnam, 2000), researchers have noticed that volunteers or those who are socially engaged in their community do so in untraditional or informal ways. Unfortunately, there remains a scarcity of research on informal volunteering (Ertas, 2016). Such lack of information includes performing informal acts of volunteering, when performed, how often performed, its recipients, and its impact on those receiving it.

Hoffman (2017) provided a valid point in that although volunteering has historically been a way for individuals to bond and create stronger communities, social media has expanded what is considered community. As a result, in-person volunteering has experienced a decline in recent years (Hoffman, 2017). If in-person, face-to-face volunteering is declining, are the bonds of trust built through volunteering weak? As the BMe Community, Black Girls Rock, and other community organizations and programs geared towards impacting society's view of people of color continue to advance, strengthen opportunities for African American millennials to develop connections and relationships. They will continue to impact the way this population group volunteers and the communities or organizations they volunteer.

**Social Capital and Volunteering**

According to scholars, volunteering creates the opportunity for relationships to be established, bonds of trust to be developed, and a sense of self to be discovered (Borgonovi, 2008; Greenberg, 2001; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Stukas et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2017; Wilson, 2012). For centuries, volunteering has been away for communities to engage with one another while filling a gap in their communities' needs. The premise of the research

surrounding social capital and volunteering is that through volunteering, relationships are established that are beneficial to every aspect of a person's life, including career goals, community engagement, relationships, and personal health. Volunteerism and social capital theory meet at the intersection of relationships, trust, and self-actualization. Goss (1999) echoes this by stating that volunteering operates within various types of social capital.

Various scholars from various perspectives have researched the intersection of volunteering and relationships, trust, and self-actualization. Brown and Ferris (2007) researched its impact on philanthropic behavior to include religious and secular giving and causes that contribute to volunteering. Through data collected from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, Brown and Ferris (2007) found that social capital has a direct role in giving, both religious and secular, as well as volunteering. Furthermore, their research found that network and norm-based social capital is relevant in volunteering and religious giving. Brown and Ferris (2007) also found that individuals possessing a high social capital based on norms tend to volunteer more and give more.

Paik and Navarre-Johnson (2011) researched the promotion and recruitment of volunteering, the social and associational ties found within volunteering, as well as the behavioral effects of involvement. Their research found that all types of networks, including religious and associational, are "significantly associated with volunteering" (Paik & Navarre-Johnson, 2011, p. 486). Their research provides "empirical support for arguments linking bonding and bridging social capital to volunteering" (Paik & Navarre-Johnson, 2011, p. 486). In addition, their research found that individuals who are trusting of others are parents, and who obtain advanced education, are trusting of others and believe in the importance of volunteering

and giving" (Paik & Navarre-Johnson, 2011, p. 489). Finally, their research found that all networks contain some form of recruitment, but volunteering efforts are based on whether or not individuals are asked to participate. Paik and Navarre-Johnson (2011) additionally stated that people are driven by their own "particular interests, pursuits, and commitments" (p. 480). These things guide the social ties and connections within the “workplace, religious organizations, voluntary associations, neighborhoods, hangouts, and families” (Paik & Navarre-Johnson, 2011, p. 480).

Kroll (2011) observed the level of influence associated with volunteering based on gender and interests. Using a dataset from the European Social Survey, Kroll (2011) measured the effect of social capital between men, women, parents, and childless adults. Kroll (2011) found that socializing, a part of informal social capital and social connectedness is essential for women's life satisfaction. Childless women are more prone to have a positive outcome from formal social capital than women with children. However, Kroll's (2011) research concluded that men, women, parents, and non-parents benefit equally from social trust and women have significantly more social capital than men.

This research will contribute to the literature surrounding volunteering, relationships, trust, and self-actualization by providing context on the African American millennial’s volunteer experience. In addition, this research will contribute insight into why African American millennials may or may not volunteer within specific spaces, what attracts African American millennial volunteers, and suggested recruitment efforts volunteer agencies can use to increase participation of this population group.

This research will explore the volunteer interests, recruitment efforts, and associational ties experienced by African American millennials with organizations that sponsor employee volunteer opportunities. African American millennials who volunteer through employer-sponsored activities, and those employed at the same organization but do not volunteer, will be explored. Furthermore, the external factors and associational ties connected with volunteering will also be explored concerning this population group to identify the benefits received and challenges experienced regarding volunteering.

**Gap in Literature**

Research exists on the importance and benefits of volunteering for varying age groups (Delgado & Staples, 2008; Gee & Payne-Sturges, 2004; Son &Wilson, 2012; Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013; Smith et al., 2016). However, a gap exists in current research surrounding the volunteer experience of African American millennials between 24-39 years of age (Carter & Marx, 2016; Clafton et al., 2014). This research seeks to examine the role previous volunteer experience plays in this population group's decision to participate in future volunteer efforts, their expectations towards volunteering, the benefits experienced, and the challenges and limitations associated with participating in formal volunteer efforts within these organizations and with these agencies.

**Significance**

Organizations such as the BMe Community and Black Girls Rock have increased their outreach and training to African American youth, millennials, and families to advance opportunities for volunteer engagement within and outside of the African American community. Nonprofit organizations and volunteer service programs such as the American Red Cross,

Habitat for Humanity, the American Cancer Society, and others seek to recruit volunteers and support organizational sustainability. Therefore, research exploring the volunteer experience of African American millennials with these organizations is needed to identify trends and valuable information that would benefit both volunteer service organizations and volunteers of color as it relates to formal volunteering.

# Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

## Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that is the basis of this research study. The social capital theory provides the framework for this research due to its focus on relationship building, strengthening, and inclusion within social networks. Through social capital theory, more insight into the experiences, expectations, and challenges experienced by African American millennials participating in formal and informal volunteering opportunities, and their impact can be studied. Exploring these experiences and their impact on this population group will serve as an additional resource to provide insight into the benefits of volunteering and challenges for this population group.

Scholars (Gross & Hardin, 2010; Reutter et al., 2009; Seaton et al., 2008; Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013) argue that volunteering fosters and builds trust, establishes identity among citizens and strengthens communities. However, there is limited research exploring the experiences of African American millennials participating in formal volunteer efforts (Carter & Marx, 2016; Clafton et al., 2014) to determine if their participation yields the same results as suggested. Because of its unique ability to marry volunteerism with social inclusion and relationships, the social capital theory stands out as the most appropriate theory for this research to examine the benefits afforded to African American millennials concerning their involvement in volunteer activities. The application of social capital theory to the experiences of this population group may further improve scholars' and practitioners' understanding of the factors contributing to the formal volunteer experience of African American millennials and ways to increase this population's involvement in such activities.

## Social Capital Theory

Scholars have long argued that trust is relational and transactional (Skinner et al., 2014), beneficial in helping humanity understand one another (Luhmann, 1979, 2000), and a vital component in social interactions (Skinner et al., 2014). The importance of establishing relationships and garnering trust is a familiar echo within society. Scholars use social capital theory to help explain this phenomenon and argue that social capital is accumulated through everyday social interactions (Putnam, 2000). In addition, at the base of social capital is the building and use of social relationships to create intangible and tangible benefits (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2002; & Putnam, 2000) such as personal and career goals and objectives as well as access to information and power.

The concept of social capital is not new and has roots dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Claridge, 2004). Scholars including Tocqueville, Weber, and Rousseau are related to the origins of social capital (Claridge, 2004). According to Trigilia (2001), Max Weber's essay *The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism* contains the idea of, although the term was not used, social capital based upon his participation in a religious ceremony and the benefits connected to such participation. According to Weber, members belonging to a particular group adhered to specific social recognition qualifications and characteristics that identified the group (Trigilia, 2001). Trigilia (2001) identified three characteristics in Weber's essay that define social capital: personal relationships found within a network, sharing information and trust within such established relationships, and the qualities within relationships that prohibit one party from taking advantage of another. In addition, Adam and Roncevic (2003) deemed Alexis de Tocqueville the "patron saint of contemporary social capitalists" (p. 156) because of his view

of American life and solid communal norms of trust (Brewer, 2003). Rousseau's ties to social capital include focusing on closed social systems, specifically among individuals related to organizational structures (Watson & Papamarcos, 2002).

According to Adam and Roncevic (2003), social capital is a "sociological concept that has not remained confined to social sciences" (p. 156), and as a result, it has increased in prominence. Watson and Papamarcos (2002) further argued that social capital's appearance as a theory occurred within the past 40 years. Within several disciplines that include anthropology, economics, sociology, and political science (Claridge, 2004; Engbers et al., 2017), social capital is conceptually contested (Farr, 2004). Sociologists, however, treat it as a conceptual rather than a measurable theory (Chalupnicek, 2010; Gannon & Roberts, 2018).

According to Claridge (2004), scholars agree on the historical origins of the term. However, a debate exists regarding the term's first usage. Some claim that L.J. Hanifan was the first to use social capital (Claridge, 2004), and others argue that the first mention of modern social capital was by Bourdieu (Portes, 1998). Modern understanding of the theory is credited to Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam (Claridge, 2004). According to Adam and Roncevic (2003), Bourdieu is the only pure sociologist (p. 157) while Putnam provides the lens of a political scientist and Coleman provides a sociological perspective through an economic analysis perspective.

Bourdieu (1983) argues that there exist two elements to social capital: social relationships that lead to access to resources and the amount and quality of resources available to be assessed. According to Grootaert and Bastelaer (2001), social capital refers to:

> The internal social and cultural coherence of society, the norms and values that govern interactions among people, and the institutions in which they are embedded. Social capital is the glue that holds societies together and without which there can be no economic growth or human well-being. Without social capital, society at large will collapse, and today's world presents some unfortunate examples of this (p. iii).

Bourdieu (1985) argued that social capital is the combination of resources available within a network of relationships established by either mutual acquaintance or recognition. Putnam and Feldstein (2004) argued that social capital consists of social networks and norms built on reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trust. Coleman (1988) believed that social capital consisted of varying parts of a social structure that dictate the actors' actions within the structure and, as a result, produce benefits that might not have otherwise been available if the actor was not part of the social fabric.

**Social Capital Theory Defined**

All definitions of social capital include a link to relationships and shared norms. According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), social capital is the "actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from networks of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit." Young (2012) referred to social capital to determine the value of social interactions, where value comes from one's ability to network and produce relationships from interacting with groups. Paxton (1999) further argued two components of social capital: quantitative, which involves the association between individuals, and qualitative, which requires associations between individuals to be reciprocal and trusting. According to Engbers et al.

(2017), the definition of social capital is derived from its function and is the product of persons or corporations acting within society. Gannon and Roberts (2018) described social capital as a broad term surrounding the norms and networks that enable collective action with the desired goal of mutual benefit. In the simplest definition, social capital is the combination of "social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness" (Putnam & Feldstein, 2004, p. 2) found within society.

According to Gannon and Roberts (2018), the makeup of social capital theory includes two elements: social relations that provide access to resources to individuals within a group and the amount and quality of the resources accessed. Conley and Udry (2010) also argued that the type of network and the number of networks a person belongs to are essential in studying social capital. Putnam and Feldstein (2004) provided categories wherewith social capital theory can be explored. Bonding tends to be inward-looking, where networks connect people who share similarities and bridging, which tends to be outward-looking and allows individuals to switch between networks to fill a gap. A third category, linking, looks at the community's relationship with organizations concerning the coordination of benefits to others (Kaunda-Khangamwa et al., 2019).

**Tenets of Social Capital Theory**

Scholars identified three tenets of social capital theory: Bonding, Bridging, and Linking. According to Agger and Jensen (2015), bonding social capital refers to the social relations and norms built based on a similarity between individuals, whether informal or intimate. Gittel and Vidal (1998) and Sabatini (2009) believe that such similarities exist between horizontal relationships found in close-knit groups of people, such as family members or friends, who share

strong ties and relations within the group. Larsen et al. (2004) further extend the bonding social capital to include community members include neighborhood residents. According to Granovetter (1973) and Larsen et al. (2004), the ties and relationships formed during bonding social capital are the building blocks that allow relationships to expand into broader social connections and networks found in bridging social capital.

Bridging social capital connects people with different backgrounds and networks by creating horizontal ties that bridge the sectors to form connections (Sabatini, 2009). According to Agger and Jensen (2015), such connectors are built through formal and informal relationships and shared norms. Sabatini (2009) and Paxton (1999) further elaborate and state that through bridging social capital, information and trust are circulated among diverse circles and individuals, thus creating an environment that "fosters transactions and economic growth" (Sabatini, 2009, p. 430) between those connected.

Linking social capital is the vertical tie that connects individuals or groups to people and groups of influence and power (Sabatini, 2009). By linking social capital, individuals and groups can access information, resources, and funding that supports them to move to a more “politically and economically effective level” (Sabatini, 2009, p. 430). Agger and Jensen (2015) argued that linking social capital differs from bridging social capital in the “vertical power relations” found evident in the connections.

**Social Capital Theory and Trust**

Considered a significant component of social capital theory, trust, in the essence of this research, is defined as the mutual understanding that neither person will exploit the vulnerability of the other (Ward et al., 2014). However, within the constructs of the social capital theory, the

concept of trust extends beyond the borders of physical interactions and the mutual understanding that prohibits exploitation. The social capital theory also includes shared norms as benevolence among people who interact (Engbers et al., 2017). As established by society, such norms become the rules by which members of society, or groups, uphold and measure actions. According to Labonte (1999), "social capital does not exist: we're busy creating it" (p. 430); it is the essence of the networks we establish around us. Such shared norms are created in environments that foster connectivity, such as volunteering. Relationships are established and set the tone for the level of benevolence shared among the group members. Engbers et al. (2017) noted that it is challenging to measure shared norms established by a community or specific focus group. As a result, scholars tend to review homogeneity and diversity as tools to measure norms. Putnam and Feldstein (2004) stated that the basis of social capital is built through trust and mutual understanding from person-to-person interaction over time. As a result, a surface-level examination of the benefits of social capital exists, which is not indicative of a community or group, but that can be generalized for all people.

**Benefits and Limitations of Social Capital Theory**

Benefits gained through volunteering are also connected to social capital theory on a relational level. Such benefits include opportunities for career benefits (Stukas et al., 2016), social connectedness (Putnam, 2000), access to resources such as information (Forbes & Zampelli, 2012), educational attainment (Chan et al., 2014), the establishment of connections among citizens (Townsend et al., 2012), and the building of trust within communities (Greenberg, 2001; Musick & Wilson, 2008). However, according to Chalupnicek (2010), social capital as an individual asset and its importance has created tension within sociology. In defense

of its use within the social sciences, Putnam (2000) and Paxton (1999) provided evidence regarding the data obtained using social capital as a theory. Durlauf and Fafchamps (2004) provided ideas for the economic view towards social capital, including positive externalities for persons apart from a group providing shared trust, norms, and values (Gannon & Roberts, 2018). According to Gannon and Roberts (2018), the ideals of norms and trust have a long history in economics that includes the relationship between social connections and financial transactions. Smith (1763, 1978) presented a similar argument by stating, "reputations for trustworthiness are transmitted through networks of tradition relationships; the denser the network…, the greater is the value of reputation and so… the greater is the degree of trust" (Gannon & Roberts, 2018, p. 4). Gannon and Roberts (2018) declared social capital as an input and an output to social and economic processes.

However, critics identify pitfalls of the theory that range “from economic bubbles to social stratification” (Engbers et al., 2017, p. 539). Markowska-Przybyla (2012) identified two major problems associated with the theory. The first being its level of complexity is ill-suited for traditional quantitative analysis techniques. According to Markowska-Przybyla (2012), the level of reductions and assumptions involved in quantitative analysis masks the complexity of relationships. The second problem is the lack of consistency applied by scholars in measuring causes, effects, and social capital, in general (Engbers et al., 2017). As a result, there exists a range of measurements for identifiers found within the theory.

**Social Capital Theory and This Research**

The generalization of social capital theory literature lacks insight into relationships and benefits of being a part of the social structure for African American millennials who volunteer.

Through exploratory and open-ended questions, this research will explore social capital within the community of African American millennials, specifically the obstacles faced and the benefits obtained with this population group through formal volunteering efforts. The constructs of social capital theory explored in this research are the social networks created, shared norms from the perspective of homogeneity and diversity, and mutual assistance, precisely that of personal or individual benefits. The post-positivist school of thought is used in this research. Through it, we will explore both the tangible and intangible benefits received through volunteering, such as social relationships and benefits gained by African American millennials, and the benefits and contributions gained by employers and nonprofit organizations engaged in these experiences, including volunteer and employer recruitment and retention.

The purpose of this study is to explore the volunteer experiences of African American millennials employed by organizations that sponsor team volunteer opportunities with service agencies. Current research focuses on the benefits of volunteering for varying age groups but does not explicitly detail the experience of African American millennials (Carter & Marx, 2016; Clafton et al., 2014). In addition, current research explores the benefits of volunteering from an assumed viewpoint of inclusivity. This study will attempt to uncover the personal experiences of African American millennials who participate in employer-sponsored volunteer activities. The semi-structured interview will inquire about the expectations, personal benefits, challenges, and limitations the participants experienced as a volunteer. The interview will also provide information about how participants decided to volunteer, their volunteer interests, and the frequency of volunteer activities.

## Research Questions

This study explores the experiences of African American millennials who volunteered for service programs sponsored by their employer. Historically, societal limitations on social interactions resulted in people of color, specifically African American, Asian, and Hispanic, lacking formal volunteering opportunities. In addition, a gap in current research exists regarding the formal volunteering experience of African Americans, specifically that of millennials (Carter & Marx, 2016; Clafton et al., 2014), and the benefits and challenges associated with volunteering among this demographic. Through the lens of Social Capital theory, research questions were developed that explore this population group's experiences, expectations, challenges, and benefits. The tenets of Social Capital Theory are bonding, bridging, and linking. These tenets led to the formation of the research questions of this study. The research questions are:

1. What are the experiences and expectations of African American millennials that participate in formal volunteering opportunities?
2. What are the challenges and limitations experienced by African American millennials participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities?
3. What are the challenges and limitations experienced by African American millennials participating in non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities?
4. What are the social benefits and opportunities created through formal volunteering experiences? What are its implications?

Bonding social capital is found within close-knit groups to include community members and expand relationships into social connections and networks (Granovetter, 1973; Larsen et al., 2004). Using bonding social capital, research questions explore the benefits of networking and

relationships created through volunteering by this population group. In addition, bonding social capital helps identify challenges experienced by this volunteer group through connections established or a lack thereof. Bridging social capital connects people from different backgrounds and allows for networks and connections (Sabatini, 2009). Bridging Social Capital allows the researcher to explore the benefits and challenges of work-related volunteer activities. Research participants and their colleagues are most likely from different backgrounds and have different networks and connections. Linking social capital creates an avenue for people to connect with people of influence and power; it opens the door and provides access to resources. Linking social capital helps the researcher explore benefits and opportunities afforded to this population group by connecting with people of influence and power by being exposed or connected to someone or something of influence and power. Table 3.1 displays the tenets of social capital theory and the corresponding research question(s).

Table 3.1 – Social Capital Theory Tenets and Research Questions

| Social Capital Theory Tenet | Research Question |
|---|---|
| Bonding | 1. What are the experiences and expectations of African American millennials that participate in formal volunteering opportunities?<br>2. What are the challenges and limitations experienced by African American millennials participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities?<br>3. What are the challenges and limitations experienced by African American millennials participating in non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 4. What are the social benefits and opportunities created through formal volunteering experiences? What are its implications? |
| Bridging | 1. What are the challenges and limitations experienced by African American millennials participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities?<br>2. What are the challenges and limitations experienced by African American millennials participating in non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities?<br>3. What are the social benefits and opportunities created through formal volunteering experiences? What are its implications? |
| Linking | 1. What are the social benefits and opportunities created through formal volunteering experiences? What are its implications? |

The next chapter discusses the methodological approach including the theoretical perspective used in conducting this quantitative research.

# CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

## Qualitative Research

To better understand the volunteer experiences of African American millennials, social capital theory is applied to a qualitative research approach conducted through narrative inquiry. The social capital theory is studied through various sources and methodologies in quantitative and qualitative research (Jones & Woolcock, 2007). However, through qualitative methods, the researcher can explore distinctions between the different dimensions of social capital theory and how the theory functions within the research participant (Dudwick et al., 2006; Jones & Woolcock, 2007).

According to Denzin et al. (2011), qualitative research makes the world more visible to the audience. In his article "The debate about quantitative and qualitative research" (1984), Bryman echoes Denzin's belief that qualitative research is inherently exploratory. He agrees that qualitative research allows the researcher to embark on a journey of discovery as they seek to view the world from the perspective of the observed population or subject. As opposed to quantitative research, the researcher who employs qualitative methods embarks on a journey filled with the observed stories. This approach allows for the formulation of a finding that is relatable and personable, and objective.

There exist various theories and approaches to conducting qualitative research. For this study, the interpretive narrative is used. The interpretivist perspective views research as an interactive process that includes the personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity of the researcher and the participants or audience (Denzin et al., 2011). As a result, the final product is comprised of fluid, interconnected images and representations, much like a

reflexive collage or montage that has individual representations that connect the parts to the whole (Denzin et al., 2011).

The methodological approach used is that of a narrative inquiry in the form of semi-structured interviews. Through the use of open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews allow the participants the opportunity to share their experiences without interviewer influence. Bryman (2011) also states that qualitative interviews must be flexible; however, he cautions researchers of the participant's potential to stray from the topic during the interview. Bryman (2011) suggests that although such digression of topic-specific conversation is not discouraged and can help generalize rhetoric for greater applicability, researchers must balance maintaining the interview flow to capitalize on sharing the experience. In addition, this will aid in keeping participants on track with the purpose of the research.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry rests on the assumption that members of society explain experience through storytelling (Bell, 2002). As a research method, Dewey (1938), however, work did not gain prominence until the method was used by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). Initially used for curriculum studies in higher education, the narrative inquiry has expanded to other disciplines (Lindsay and Schwind, 2016). Lindsay and Schwind (2016) quoted Dewey (1938) and Connelly and Clandinin (1990) in stating, “narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience” (p. 15) and allows for the “reliving and retelling of stories and experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social” (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15). Holley and Colyar (2009) further stated that narrative inquiry is based on the premise that humans "experience the world and interact with others through storied lives" (p. 680).

Johnson (1987) argued that cultures are understood based on the knowledge found in narrative theory. Polkinghorne (1998) later identified narratives as descriptive or explanatory, which serve as an outlet for individuals to share their stories. Bateson (1994) argued that people learn about the world around them through narratives. Geertz (1995) argued that people made sense of the world around them through the stories told. Geertz (1995) also believed in a connection between the narratives people told and historical events.

**Constructs of Narrative Inquiry**

According to Lindsay and Schwind (2016), a three-dimensional aspect of narrative inquiry exists whereby “experience happens in a place or places over time, and in a relationship, which may be within oneself or with others” (p. 15). In addition, Holley and Colyar (2009) argued that through gathering stories, "researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them using a plot into a story or stories" (p. 680). Lindsay and Schwind (2016) further argue that the personal-social quality found within the narrative inquiry, coupled with its three-dimensional perspective, informs knowledge and identity.

Qualitative narrative inquiry research allows the lived experiences of the researcher to provide insight into the subject being explored. According to Lindsay and Schwind (2016), the narrative inquiry process includes participants interested in the research topic and willing to discuss their story and perspective on the topic either one-on-one with the researcher or with a small group. The following steps include "open-ended request to share the experience of the research phenomenon" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15), in which the researcher paraphrases back the participant's responsibility to ensure understanding and clarification of questions and responses (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the

intended narrative for research undergoes three levels of justification that include personal, practical, and social, and each level of justification "sheds light on how participants' storied experiences inform the inquiry" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 16).

According to Lindsay and Schwind (2016), the personal justification level allows the researcher to reflect on their own "personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, tensions, observations, and insights" (p. 16). The practical justification level allows the researcher to "discern emerging narrative threads within and across the stories, which, upon further reflection, become visible as narrative patterns" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 16). The social justification level provides the researcher with a global perspective on the topic and its impact socially (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016).

The final step involves the researcher formulating the narrative from a compilation of the stories shared by the research participants (Smith-Chandler & Swart, 2014). Bell (2002) further argues that this requires going beyond the story and conducting an "analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates" (p. 208). Adler et al. (2017) state that this process is achieved by coding responses based on themes. The NVivo qualitative software will code the interview and focus group transcripts and analyze this research.

**Advantages and Limitations of Narrative Inquiry**

Holley and Colyar (2009) explained narrative inquiry as a "story told through a range of characters" (p. 681) in which the characters, or participants, provide a way for the story to unfold. The benefit of this type of methodology is that it allows researchers to present a holistic view of the topic (Bell, 2009). However, the limitation of this type of methodology is that the information and story gathered from the participant is based on the participant's perception, no

matter how fictionalized it may be (Bell, 2009). Adler et al. (2017) further argue that researchers must be intentional in asking questions that produce responses containing personal meaning. As a result, researchers must find common threads within stories.

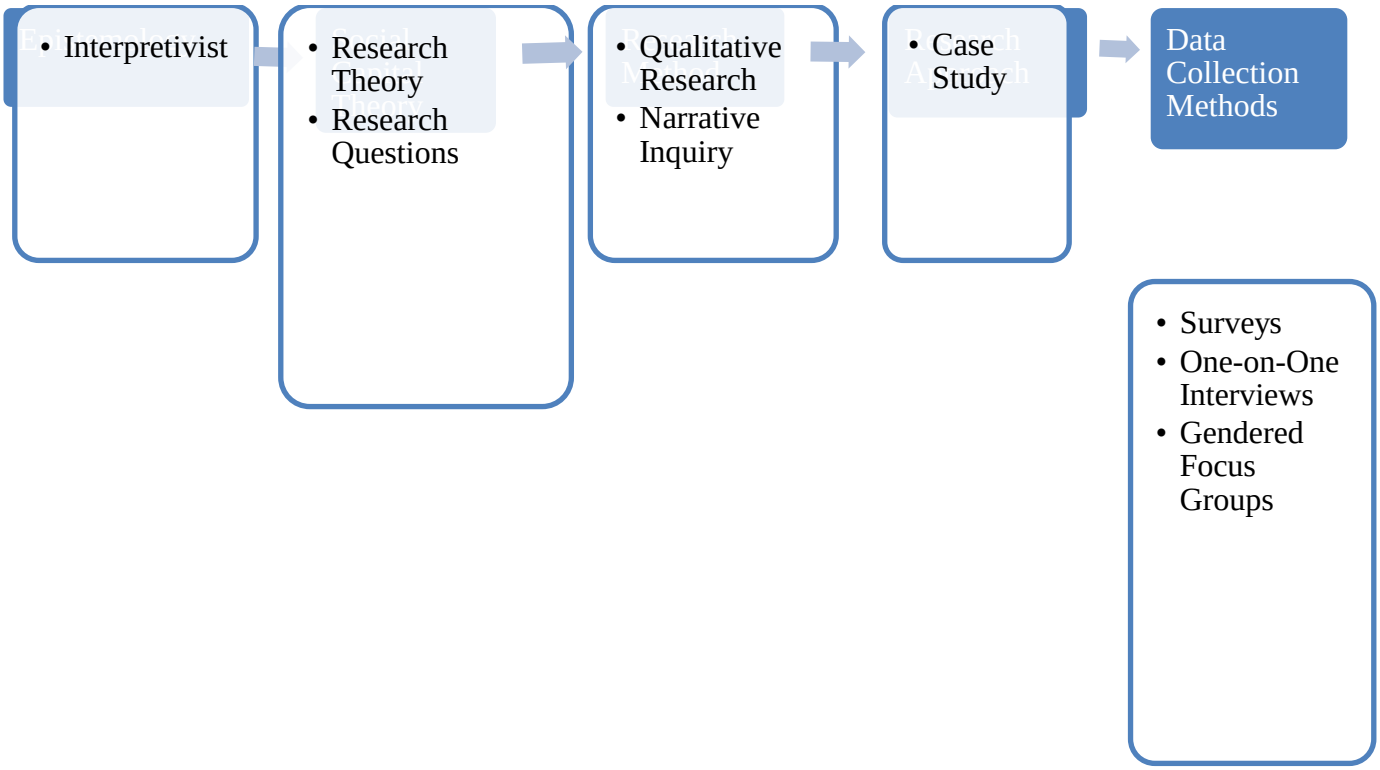
**Social Capital Theory and Narrative Inquiry**

The social capital theory is built upon the premise that connections are vital to the human experience. According to Oztas (2004), there has been an increase in social capital theory as an analytical tool to explain individuals and the varying nature of organizations. Brown and Ferris (2007) state there is "significant heterogeneity among individuals both in the extent of their embeddedness in associational networks and in their levels of giving and volunteering" (p. 86). However, identifying such behavior may not always be directly observable as social capital is shown in various ways (Brown & Ferris, 2007). As a result, personal narration through narrative inquiry is used to identify the characteristics of social capital evident in the population group's experiences, benefits, and challenges.

**Narrative Inquiry and This Research Topic**

For this study, a narrative inquiry will be used to explore the volunteer experience of African American millennials, how research can impact the volunteer experience of this population group and increase volunteerism among this population group with volunteer service agencies. Narrative Inquiry can highlight personal experiences by “making transparent how assumptions, values, and beliefs inform our worldviews" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 18).

Figure 4.1 – Research Design




The research design chosen is a case study. As described in Figure 4.1, research design begins with philosophical considerations, then moves to the nature of the inquiry, the research strategy, and finally data collection methods. The epistemological approach is the interpretivist philosophical lens for this research, which allows the research and the participants to engage in an interactive process using personal history, race, and biography. This approach allows the researcher the ability to connect with participants and gain insight into their volunteer experiences.

Because of the nature of the research, a qualitative study is deemed the most appropriate research analysis due to its ability to allow research data to express themes generated from stories. Narrative inquiry is used to create a space where participants can share their personal

stories and lived experiences. This allows the researcher to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Based on the literature review and research questions, the suggested research approach is the case study. The case study further aids in the researcher's ability to gain insight into the research topic and explore the topic. In addition, to obtain construct validity, participant stories and insight on the research topic were collected using the following methods: online surveys, one-on-one interviews, and gender specific focus groups.

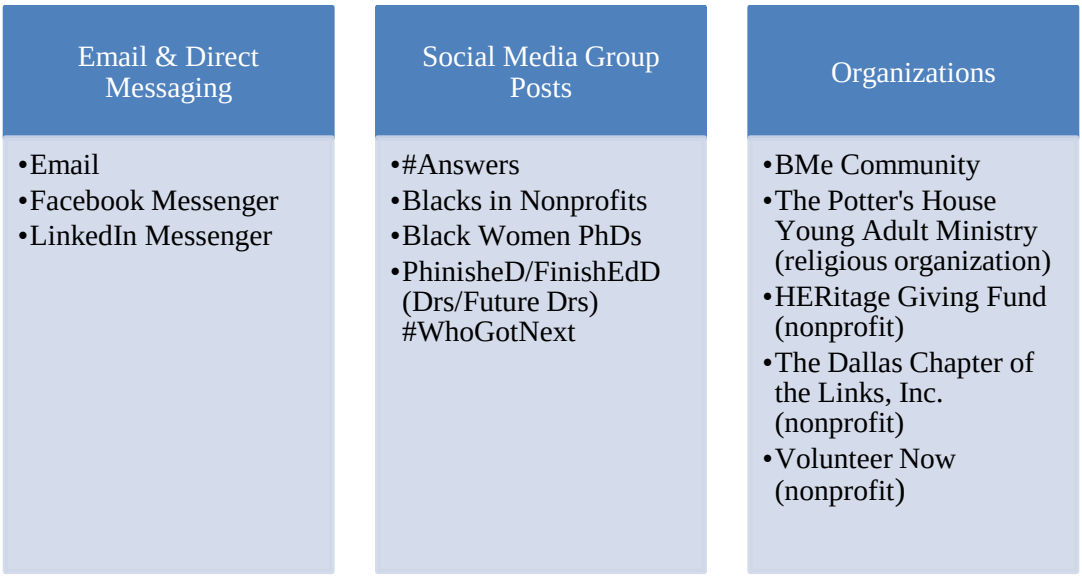
# Chapter 5: Data Collection and Analysis

## Data Collection

The unit of analysis for this research is African American or Black millennials, age 25-39, employed with organizations that sponsor employee volunteer activities. This research explores the experiences and expectations, challenges and limitations, and benefits African American millennials receive through volunteering. This research further explores the implications of these experiences and their impact on nonprofit organizations. Data collection occurred using a three-phase process that included online surveys, virtual interviews, and focus groups.

After receiving approval from the University of Texas at Arlington's Institutional Review Board (IRB), research participants were recruited in various ways. Recruitment methods included emails and messages sent through Facebook messenger and LinkedIn messaging tools. In addition, announcements and recruitment posts were made in the following Facebook groups: #ANSWERS, Blacks in Nonprofits, Black Women PhDs, and PhinisheD/FinishEdD (Drs/Future Drs) #WhoGotNext. Social organizations such as the BMe Community; religious organizations such as The Potter's House Young Adult Ministry; nonprofit organizations based in Dallas, Texas, such as HERitage Giving Fund, The Dallas Chapter of The Links, Inc., and Volunteer Now were also contacted using email and word of mouth to recruit research participants. Please see Figure 5.1 for a summary of the recruitment efforts. Participant recruitment occurred over four months. In addition, participants were given a $10 Amazon electronic gift card upon completion of the online survey and the one-on-one virtual interview as an incentive for participating.

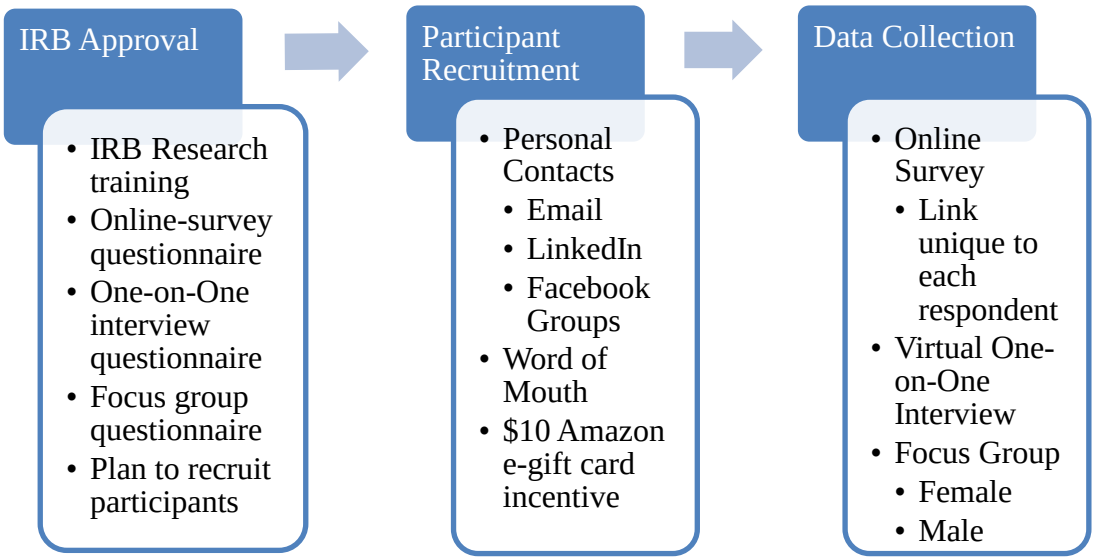
Figure 5.1 – Recruitment Efforts




After responding to the initial email request, participants were provided a custom link unique to their email address and invited to complete the online survey. After completing the online survey, respondents were invited to participate in the virtual one-on-one interview. Various days and times were presented to allow participants to select the best date and time to complete the interview. Virtual one-on-one interviews occurred over six months, with most of the interviews occurring within the first three months. Participants living in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex were then invited to participate in a third component of the data collection, participant observation. However, due to Covid-19 restrictions, the participant observation portion was put on hold. The researcher contacted scholars Dr. Robert Putnam and Dr. Daniel Aldrich regarding navigating research during disasters to assist with this change. From the insight of Drs. Karabi Bezboruah, Robert Putnam, and Daniel Aldrich, virtual focus groups replaced the in-person participant observation. Due to the change, participants who completed

the online survey and the virtual one-on-one interview were invited to participate in two gender-specific focus groups. Four focus groups, two female focus groups and two male focus groups, were planned and conducted over three weeks. Figure 5.2 outlines the data collection process.

Figure 5.2 - Data Collection Process




Through personal emails, LinkedIn messages, and Facebook messages, 242 people were directly contacted by the researcher. Two hundred two people were contacted through LinkedIn, 13 were contacted through email, and 27 were contacted through personal messages using Facebook messenger. Potential participants were messaged based on their ethnicity, age, and employment status known by the researcher. In addition, each participant was also asked to help spread the word to other possible participants. An invitation to complete the online survey was distributed to 51 individuals interested in participating in the study. Of the 51 who were invited to complete the online survey, 31 viewed the online survey. Participants were contacted an average of four times with reminders to complete the survey, with each reminder occurring every

10-12 days over two months. Figure 5.3 displays the participant responses during each stage of recruitment and data collection.

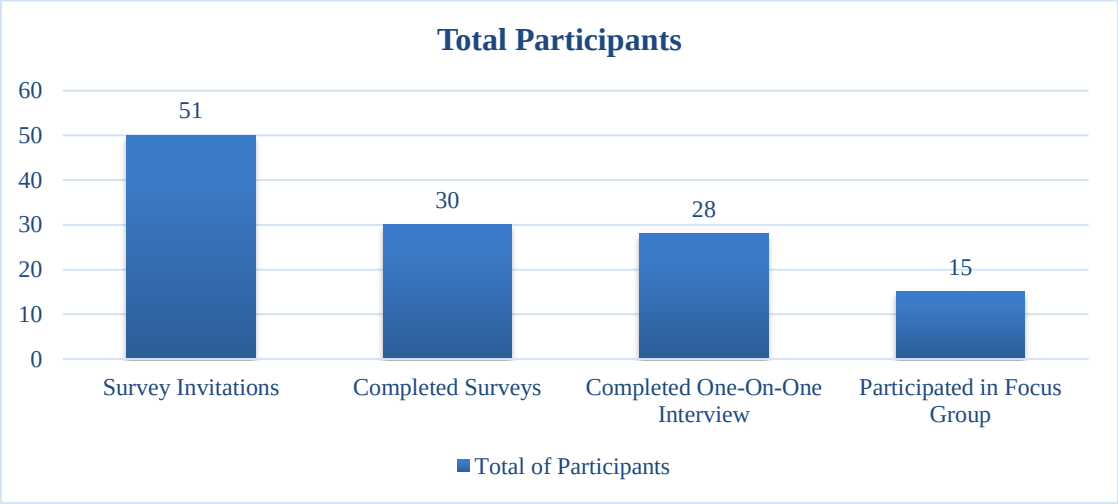
Of the 51 people invited to complete the online survey, 31 started the survey. Of the 31 people who started the survey, 30 completed the survey. Of the 30 participants who completed the survey, 17 were female, and 13 were men. Of the 30 participants who completed the online survey, 28 completed the virtual one-on-one interview. All 28 participants who completed the one-on-one interview were invited to participate in a focus group. Due to the number of participants invited to participate in the focus groups, the focus groups were broken into two smaller groups to allow each participant the opportunity to provide insight and share their experience. Of the 28 who completed the virtual one-on-one interview, 15 participated in 1 of 4 focus groups broken into two groups, each for male and female participants.

For the female focus groups, eight participants were invited to participate in the first female focus group. Of the eight invited, six participated. In addition, eight participants were invited to participate in the second female focus group. Of the eight invited, two participated. In total, the female focus group had 8 participants. For the male focus groups, eleven participants were invited to participate in the first male focus group. Of the 11 invited, four participated. In addition, nine participants were invited to participate in the second male focus group, including those who did not participate in the first male focus group. Of the nine invited, three participated. In total, the male focus groups had seven participants.

Overall, 60% of respondents who were invited to take the online survey accessed the online survey. 96% of the participants who accessed the online survey completed the online survey. Of the 98% who completed the online survey, 93% completed the virtual one-on-one

interviews. Of the 93% who completed the one-on-one interviews, 53% participated in one of four focus groups separated by gender.

Figure 5.3- Respondent Participation




**Challenges**

The following were challenges within the data collection phase of this research—the first being follow-through with participants who expressed interest in participating. Of the 51 online survey invitations sent to individuals who expressed interest, 31 respondents accessed the survey, and 30 completed the survey. Reminder emails were sent to encourage the completion of the survey. In addition, some participants who expressed interest in participating did not meet the qualifications due to age, and one respondent did not feel they had enough time to participate because of the early arrival of an addition to their family.

Another challenge in the data collection stage of this research included the ability to perform in-person participant observations for participants in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex due to in-person limitations imposed by COVID-19 restrictions. As a result of local restrictions,

the third data source changed from participant observation at a volunteer site to gender-specific focus groups. A third challenge in the data collection process included the validity of two respondents interested in the survey. The location of the respondents was questionable; however, neither of these two individuals completed the online survey; therefore, they did not progress through the data collection phases of the research. Finally, securing participation in the focus group was challenging as a few months had passed since the virtual one-on-one interview, and although many participants understood the reason for the change in the third phase, the timing and availability of their participation were limited. In addition, two participants had changed jobs and could not be located.

## Research Participants

***Demographics*.** This research focused on the volunteering experiences of a specific population group, African American or Black millennials ages 25-39. Research participants included 17 females and 13 males who identified as African American or Black and were between 25-39 years of age. Figure 5.4 shows the gender of research participants. Figure 5.5 details the age of participants participating in the research study. Figure 5.6 details the age participants began volunteering. A total of 30 individuals participated in this research study. Research participants were employed with corporations, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations in positions that included analysts, consultants, entry-level professionals, executive-level leadership, management, and mid-level professionals.

Figure 5.4 - Participant Gender

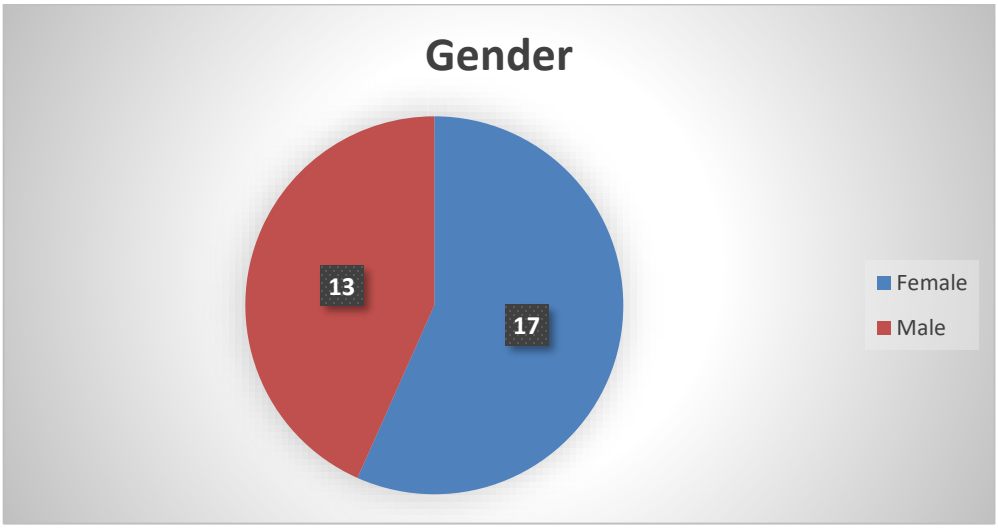



Figure 5.5 - Participant Age

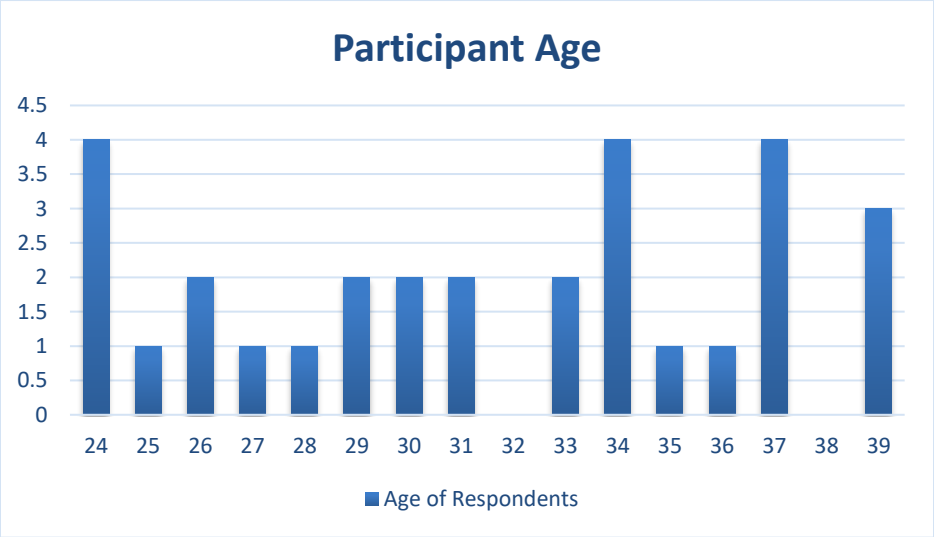
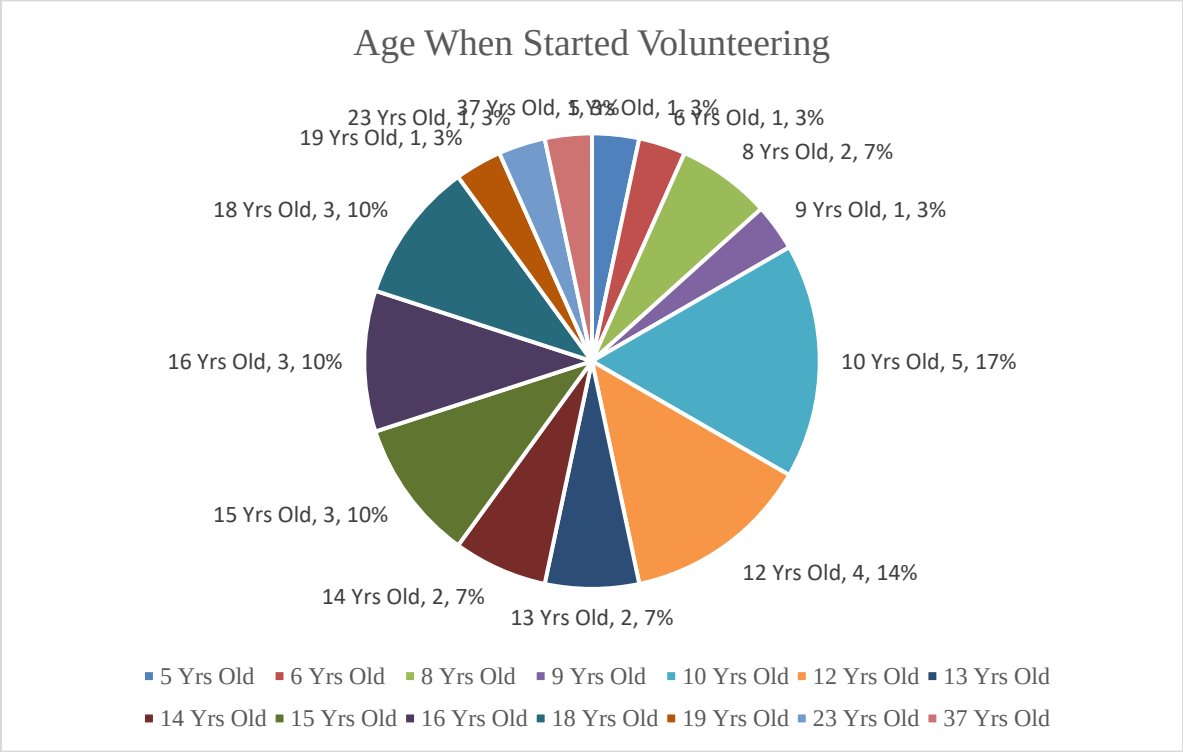


Figure 5.6 - Participant's Age When Started Volunteering




Participants for this study were located in five states: Florida, Texas, Michigan, Illinois, and Virginia, as well as the country of Russia. In addition, research participants were employees of large and small organizations ranging from Fortune 500 companies to small nonprofit organizations in banking, consulting, education, energy, government, healthcare, insurance, mass communication, social services, and travel. Table 5.7 displays the types of organizations for which research participants were employed.

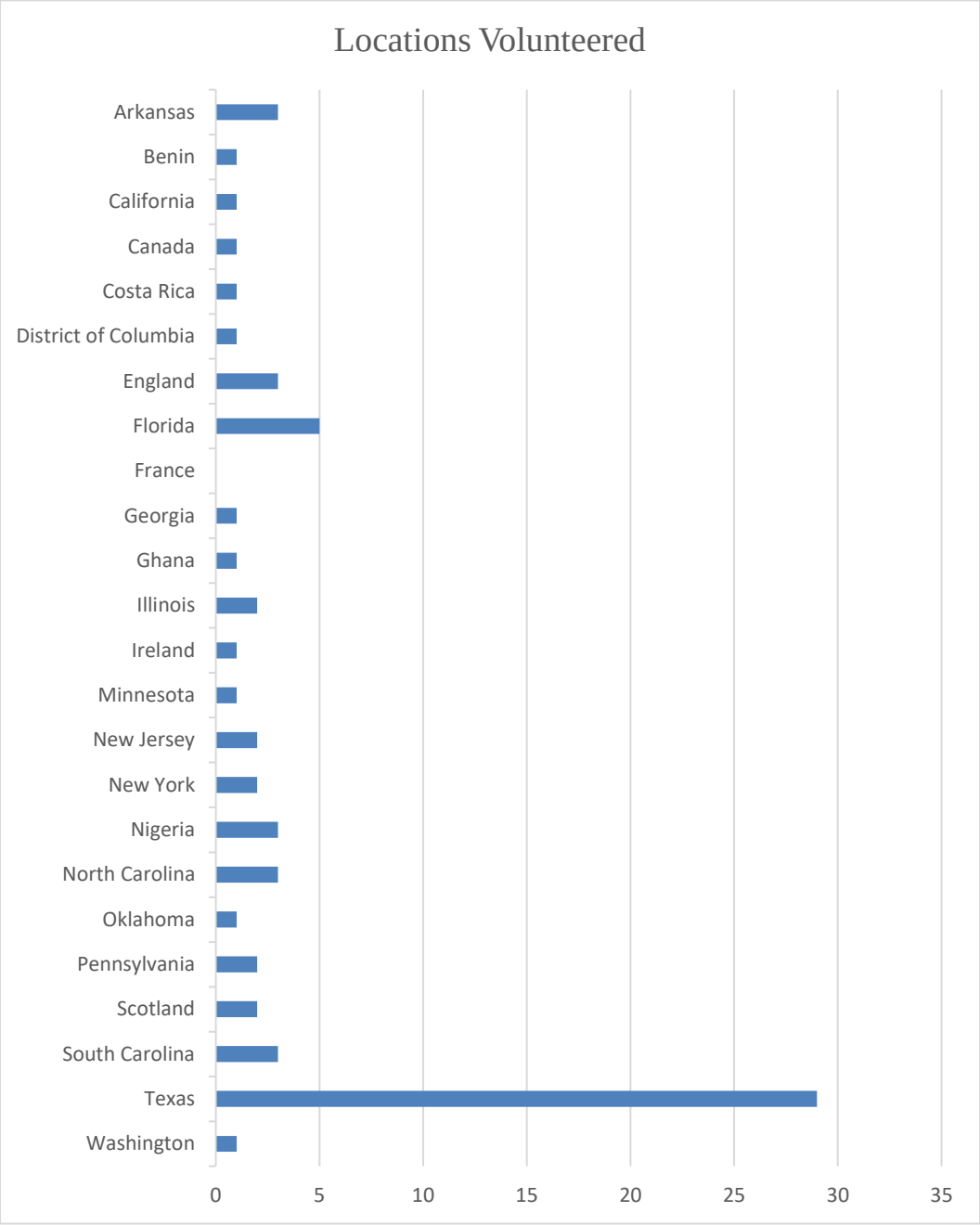
Table 5.1 – Organizations Where Participants Are Employed

| Industry | Size of the Organization | Number of Employees | Countries Located |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Banking** | Medium | 8,000 | 3 |
| **Consulting** | Large | 334,000 | 150 |
| **Education – Company A** | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| **Education – Company B** | Medium | 6,000 | 1 |
| **Energy** | Small | 1,800 | 1 |
| **Government** | Small | Unknown | 1 |
| **Healthcare – Company A** | Large | 40,000 | 1 |
| **Healthcare – Company B** | Large | Unknown | Unknown |
| **Insurance – Company A** | Large | Unknown | Unknown |
| **Insurance – Company B** | Large | 58,000 | 1 |
| **Mass Communication** | Large | 230,000 | 190 |
| **Private - Marketing & Distribution** | Medium | 1,500 | 1 |
| **Social Services – Company A** | Small | 3 | 1 |
| **Social Services – Company B** | Small | Unknown | 1 |
| **Social Services – Company C** | Small | 2 | 1 |
| **Social Services – Company D** | Small | 16 | 1 |
| **Social Services – Company E** | Medium | 254 | 1 |
| **Social Services – Company F** | Small | Unknown | 1 |
| **Travel** | Large | 228,000 | 1 |

In this study, participants had volunteered in 72 cities, 15 states, and ten countries. Figure 5.7 displays the cities and locations where participants have volunteered. In addition, research participants served as volunteers with organizations such as the American Heart Society, Boys &

Girls Club of America, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Habitat for Humanity, Meals on Wheels, National Pan-Hellenic Greek organizations, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), The National Urban League, Relay for Life, Year Up, local organizations, political campaigns, professional organizations, religious institutions, and educational institutions.

Figure 5.7 - Cities/Locations Where Participants Volunteered



**Online Survey**

The first phase of the data collection process included an online survey conducted through the survey platform, QuestionPro. Over four months, from June 2020 to September 2020, participants were invited to complete the online survey portion of the research. Participants could begin the survey and return later to complete the survey. According to data from the online survey platform, QuestionPro, the average completion time of the online survey was 29 minutes. In addition, as a guide to the researcher, the interview protocol was used as the data collection tool (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) for the interviews and gender-specific focus groups.

Narrative inquiry was the methodological approach used because of its ability to allow the research participant to explain their experience through storytelling (Bell, 2002) and as a way for the researcher to understand the experience (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). In addition, one aspect of the constructs of narrative inquiry supports the research dynamics that exist in that "experience happens in a place or places over time" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p. 15). In keeping with narrative inquiry and the integrity of the subject's experience, the online survey was developed and analyzed using the QuestionPro survey platform. Likert scale questions were used in the data collection portion of this survey to allow participants to select the choice that best aligns with their experiences and views. The online survey included 42 questions with three demographic questions; two short answers allowed participants to identify organizations they have volunteered for and cities they have volunteered. In addition, the survey also included 37 Likert scale questions surrounding the benefits received from volunteering, challenges associated with volunteering, and exposure to volunteering. Figure 5.8 displays sample questions from the online survey. Figure 5.9 displays the response rate of the online survey.

Figure 5.8 – Online Survey Snapshot

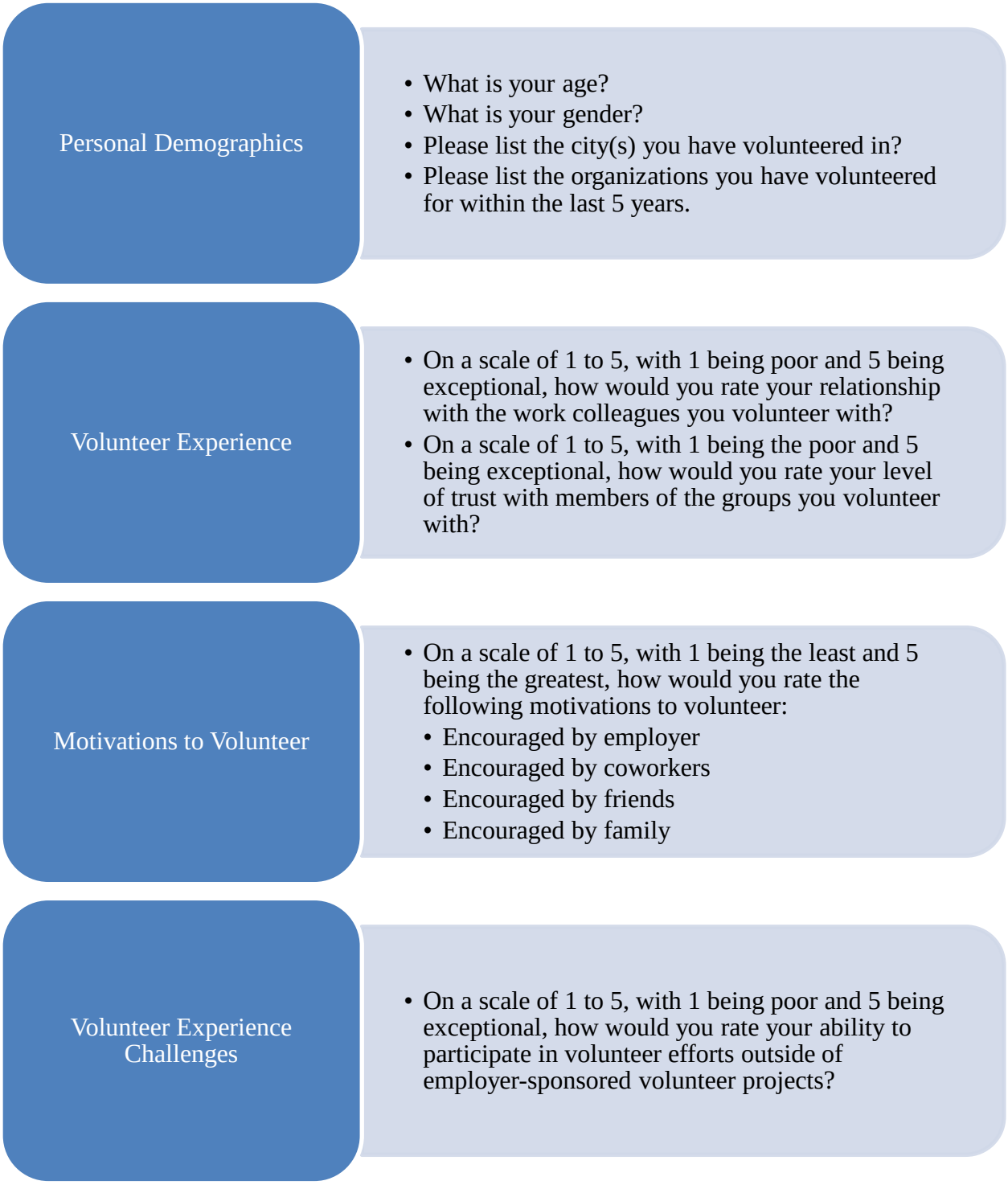
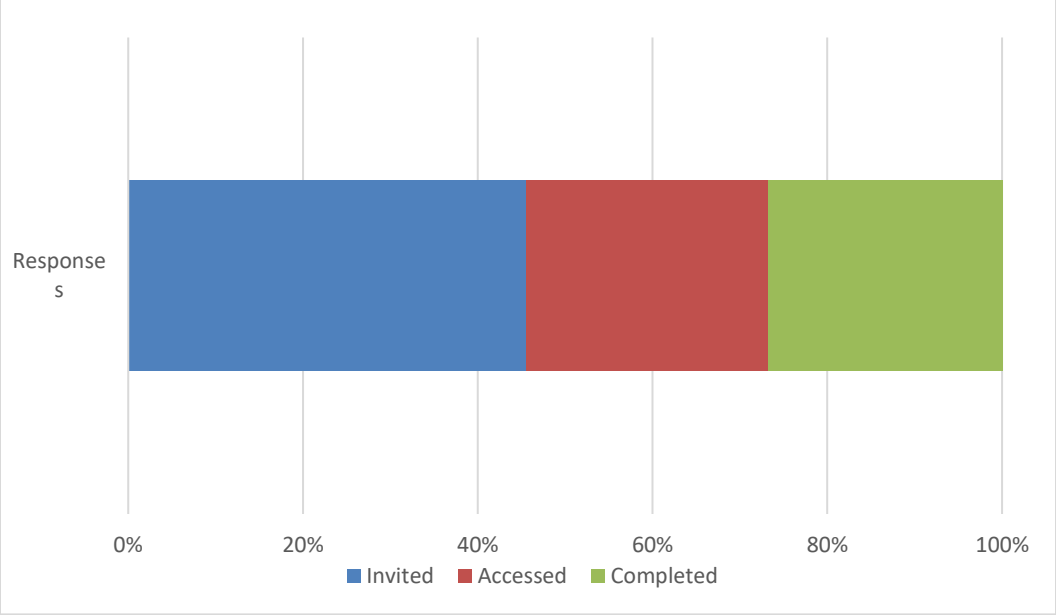


Figure 5.9 - Online Survey Response Rate




**Virtual One-on-One Interviews**

After completing the online survey, each participant was invited to participate in a virtual one-on-one interview. Various days and times were presented to allow participants to select the best date and time to complete the interview. Respondents were contacted on average of two (2) times to schedule the virtual one-on-one interview. Virtual one-on-one interviews occurred over six months, with most of the interviews occurring over four months. Once scheduled, participants received an email and calendar invite with the link to the virtual interview. All virtual one-on-one interviews were held over the video conferencing platform, Zoom. In addition, the interviews were audio-recorded using this same platform and lasted between 26 minutes to 66 minutes. The interviews were based on participant availability. Most interviews lasted close to an hour; however, a couple of interviews had to be put on temporary hold until the remainder of the interview could be finished due to time limitations.

The purpose of the recorded interview was so that the researcher could accurately capture each verbal response. The stretch in survey completion time is due to a few participants had to complete the virtual one-on-one interview in two sittings due to other obligations.

Virtual one-on-one interviews included 40 semi-structured open-ended questions in a conversation-style format focusing on the challenges and limitations of volunteering, benefits of volunteering, and demographic information. At the end of the interview, participants were encouraged to share any additional information regarding their volunteer experience. Upon completing the interview, each participant confirmed their email address and received a $10 Amazon electronic gift card for their participation.

**Focus Groups**

Due to restrictions imposed due to Covid-19, the third phase of the data collection process was changed from in-person participant observation for respondents in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex to virtual focus groups. In January 2021, participants who had completed the online survey and the one-on-one interview were invited to participate in one of two gender-specific focus groups: two female focus groups and two male focus groups for a total of four focus groups. No incentive was provided for participation in the focus groups. Participants were given an option of two days and two time periods to participate in the focus groups. Participants were encouraged to select which of the two dates provided worked best for their schedule. Focus groups were held on Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons and lasted between 50 and 60 minutes.

For this phase, the researcher began each focus group by asking questions that allowed participants to discuss their volunteer experiences among peers freely. The researcher allowed

the conversation to flow organically by letting the participants speak freely about their volunteer experiences and uncover new discussion topics. In general, the focus group consisted of nine semi-structured open-ended questions plus any additional insight on a topic brought to light by attendees. The researcher included any additional topics posed by the first male focus group into the remaining three focus groups to maintain consistency. A total of four focus groups were held: two female focus groups and two male focus groups. The female focus groups had six and two participants, respectively, for a total of eight participants. The male focus groups had four and three participants, respectively, for a total of seven participants. A total of 15 respondents participated in the focus groups.

**Data Analysis**

Research data were analyzed using a combination of methods. Answering research question 1, the online survey responses were analyzed using the QuestionPro software survey system for Likert scale responses and demographic information. The short answer response portions of the online survey were compiled and provided in Figures 5.5, 5.6, and 5.7. The virtual one-on-one interviews and gender-based focus groups were transcribed using Otter.ai, a transcription service, and analyzed using the NVivo 12 coding and analysis program.

Each one-on-one interview and gender-based focus group occurred using the Zoom platform and was recorded. Each recording was transcribed using the transcription service, Otter.ai. After the transcription was complete, the researcher reviewed each transcript for accuracy, making corrections as needed based on the recorded interviews. Transcribed interviews were then redacted to remove any identifiers, including place of employment and

personal identifiers. Redacted interviews were emailed to research participants to review and offer suggestions on additional redactions and content they thought were needed.

Once the research participants approved the interview transcripts, each interview was coded using the NVivo system. The first step in the coding process using NVivo included uploading each interview and focus group response to the system. After which, the interviewer reviewed each transcript and marked or coded research participant responses. Codes were based on the research question and put in categories of challenges – volunteering with work, challenges – volunteering outside of work, benefits, recommendations to improve, and others. Types of codes included challenge-timework, challenge-time-nonwork, challenge-flexibility, benefit-connections, benefit-better outlook on life, improve-marketing, improve-community outreach, etc. After each transcript was coded, the interviewer reviewed the number of times each code was marked, and the top-ranking codes were identified as leading challenges, benefits, and recommendations.

In addition, the researcher paid for a one-hour consulting Zoom call with qualitative researcher and NVivo expert Dr. Jaroslaw "Jarek" Kriukow to ensure proper uploading and coding of data.

**Validity**

To ensure the validity of responses, the researcher carefully reviewed transcribed interview responses processed through an artificial intelligence transcription service, Otter.ai. After this review, individual interview transcripts were sent to research participants to review and confirm the results. This review of data and responses is recommended by Kvale (1996) and increases the reliability of data collected through the interview process. This approach was used

for both the virtual one-on-one interviews and the gender-based focus groups. In addition, this process of reviewing responses using the transcription program, additional review by the researcher, and the replay of the recorded interview and focus group, and a third review by the research participant further validate the responses.

# Chapter 6: Findings

## Overview

This chapter focuses on the results found in the research surrounding the volunteering experiences of African American millennials. The research sought to explore the experiences and expectations, challenges and limitations, benefits and opportunities obtained through volunteering, and the implications that may be useful for nonprofit and volunteer organizations regarding future volunteer engagement and retention. In addition, research results contain experiences regarding employer-sponsored and non-employer-sponsored volunteering.

## Experiences and Expectations

***Experiences.*** Research data yielded positive and negative responses on the volunteer experiences of African American millennials participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities. The researcher was able to identify the following responses.

### Employer-Sponsored

A common response regarding the experience of participating in an employer-sponsored volunteer activity was that their organizations did not require or mandate participation. Although participation was not required to maintain employment, participants perceived that the organization's culture strongly encouraged participation. According to some respondents, participation in employer-sponsored volunteer activities contributed to being considered for promotions within the organization. Research participants also stated that participation in employer-sponsored volunteer activities provided access and a sense of inclusion and connectedness to other colleagues and executives who participated in the employer-sponsored volunteer activities. The belief was that those who participated in the employer-sponsored

volunteer activity felt a part of the team. Respondents also stated that participating helped establish relationships with colleagues who participated versus those who did not attend the employer-sponsored volunteer activities. Research participants also reported taking pride in working for companies with corporate social responsibility initiatives and were involved in their community. This finding aligns with the bridging tenet of Social Capital Theory in that participants had access to participation and were able to connect with and develop relationships with colleagues across various departments and from diverse backgrounds.

Another common response identified was the inability to be true to their identity and personality without fearing how others would perceive them. As a result, participants felt they had to maintain a professional image while controlling how others saw them. According to research participants, this caused participation in the volunteer activity to be viewed as another restricted and professional day of work instead of a more relaxed environment. Albeit enjoyable, volunteering with colleagues did not compare to volunteering with friends, those people the participant knows outside of work. Volunteering with friends was seen as more enjoyable because of the more relaxed feeling accompanying it.

Participants identified the ability to connect with colleagues and executive leaders on another level. They valued the ability to connect with individuals outside of their regular work team, unit, or department and connect with others within the company. Participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities helped them strengthen relationships with colleagues they had previously only known through email correspondence or limited interaction. Research participants also mentioned interacting and speaking with the executive leadership team members in a more relaxed environment outside of work. According to some, the ability to

volunteer on-site with a member of the executive leadership team allowed them to have a more positive view of the company and senior leadership and opened the door to connect one-on-one with senior-level executives. This finding aligns with the linking tenet of Social Capital Theory in that the volunteer activities allowed participants access to people and groups of power and influence.

Also, research participants at times viewed the appearance of the executive-level leadership team as more of a photoshoot and publicity event rather than the real purpose and mission of the organization they were there to help. According to research participants, staff and senior-level executives performed menial tasks before and during the video or photo request. However, once the photos were captured, only those sincere about helping remained to assist the nonprofit agency or complete the volunteer task. In turn, some research participants questioned the sincerity of the motive for participating as they felt the photoshoots were exploiting the nonprofit organization and the program recipients.

In addition, participant responses included the perception of a savior-like mentality from volunteers not identifying as people of color participating in volunteer efforts serving low-income or underserved communities. Research participants did not identify if the savior complex was more prevalent in formal or informal volunteer activities. Rather, they stated that their experience with the savior complex occurred while participating in volunteer activities that served communities of color and lower socio-economic communities. In addition, research participants expressed experiencing the savior complex while serving on mission trips to rural, low-income, or communities considered to be communities of color. Table 6.1 displays

participant responses regarding the savior complex. Table 6.2 displays participants responses to addressing the savior complex within organizations.

Table 6.1: Savior Complex and Participant Responses

| Theme | Participant Response | Participant Response – Different Perspective |
|---|---|---|
| **Savior Complex** | Male Participant: "…you want to feel like they're really doing the work for the community… that they're actually working with community, and they value the people in those communities, and they're not looking at it as like, these communities are somehow less than and just can't survive without their influence or input." | Female Participant: "…I guess, people's expectations. I think people sometimes come in, and myself included, come in kind of unintentionally, with kind of like a savior complex where I'm like, 'I'm gonna come in, and I'm gonna do all this great stuff, and it's gonna be awesome. And I'm going to change the world in two hours, and it's going to be great. But setting the expectation that it's bigger than you, this isn't about you. And you are an important piece of the puzzle but you are not the piece. You aren't the puzzle so yeah, mindset, a mindset shift needs to happen." |
| | Male Participant: "...I've been, and I don't know when it happened, but I've been much more aware, I say the last five years around…not like people not looking at the community as if they're victims or helpless or, and say to say it real plain, looking down on them. And so I think that gets into the issue with a lot of white organizations or white-ran organizations where they unfortunately have a tendency to think they get the high-minded approach as if you know, the white savior complex, if you will, whatever you call it. But we are in here, and this community, and even how they frame the conversation. I've been in some settings where like, without us, this community will completely be in tatters, | Female Participant: "I interned in…for one semester. And one of the biggest things we had to do was volunteer. So I had like a seminar…where you mainly, your program was focused on. And mine was social and economic development. And we talked about like…immigration from…. So I noticed while being out there in…that there were a lot of, you know, black and brown people doing like selling goods on the streets or in the subways and things like that. And we were talking about, like, in ways that they have been oppressed. Um, yeah, we had |

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| | these kids won't eat, everything will basically fall to none. And I'm like, some of that may be true, but if you walk into a my, if you come in and treat these people as if they're not human, they're not equivalent, they're not equals, if you will, I think that does more abuse than it does good. Because there's an element of, hey, I'm trying to meet a need, whether it be, you know, providing water, providing food, providing supplies, but there's also an element of sort of pride and dignity that these people need to have…. But it needs to come through the organization that's rendering these services…. Even on the depictions of African countries and stuff like that…I think it did a huge disservice when we've been seeing images of that for the last 60 years of people who can't stand on their own two feet without somebody from the Western society, if you will, dropping some food on them or something like that. It's just it's not a true statement. And the sinister thing is that there is a underlying narrative that these people are less than people." | to create a volunteer event. So we decided to partner with a local nonprofit out there and help cook a whole, there's like a soup kitchen. And we cooked a whole bunch of food. And a lot of people came like, there were so many…that were like, you know, looking for a job, like looking for a way to stay…because there was a lot of controversy…. And the reason why they were fleeing, like the stories that will come about were just heartbreaking. And it just showed me that there's a lot of work to be done in those areas, by people like myself, like at my age, being able to be exposed to those problems and figuring out ways to prevent them." |
| | Male Participant: "Um, I'm happy that it's starting to become a little bit more talked about. But yeah, no, that's definitely something that needs to be addressed in terms of the way that they work with the communities and the way that they view the communities and view their role in the communities because that's one thing that a lot of white organizations don't want to talk about. They don't want to talk about what their role has been previously in the community, um, historically, financially so yeah, no that's a can of worms that needs to be opened a little bit more often in those spaces." | Female Participant: "…so for example, …we went to…volunteer, we're all black. The church that was hosting us was white. But the community that we were helping was black. So the black people in the…community…they're looking at us like, first of all, y'all know y'all in the wrong town. Because, y'all, even though y'all look like us, we know that y'all don't come from the place that we come from. So that's the first barrier…. What are y'all doing here? You know, it's just, and I'm just like, 'why is everyone perceiving us to be so different?" Like, what do y'all see about us that, like, we obviously |

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| | | can't see. And 'til this day, I mean, until this day, I still, I mean, I think it's just a difference of how we were raised." |
| | Female Participant: "Because for me, I know respect is very important. You don't go anywhere raising your head up and saying that I did this or, you know, being snobbish, which goes into you don't take pictures…and post it on social media…. Just makes me realize, you know, the savior complex, and white savior complex, you know, that I just, I'm a savior, I'm here to get what I'm doing when there's so many other people doing the same things…. So, it's just, I don't know, it's an unsettled feeling. For me, it's an unsettled conversation. And it's just something that now I go through and try to, in my own life and what I do, try to figure out how I'm coming int a space with that sort of savior complex and savior mentality and figuring out how to address that for me personally, before I enter any space when I'm volunteering my time to any cause." | |
| | Female Participant: "Yes, all the time. Especially in agencies and services that are in…or impoverished areas. You have everyone from the north coming with their church group, they always, they come to save little babies, they come and they pray over them. And then they have to show you a trip to Africa. They have to show you some connection to something that is black or black adjacent. You see a lot of it. And then they go back to the house in…." | |
| | Female Participant: "I thought of missionary trips, but I can see that locally as well. Or even, you know those who make it a point to tell you that they're doing those things… They may tell you like, oh, I volunteered at this, you know, urban homeless shelter or something just to | |

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| | let me know, like, you know, I did this for your people so you're welcome." | |

Table 6.2: Addressing Savior Complex

| Theme | Participant Response |
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| **Addressing Savior Complex** | Male Participant: "I'll say one, educate themselves on what the white savior complex is, where it comes from, its effect, not only on the community, but on the perpetrator. And to do it from the lens of just learning not from the lens of, you know, guilt or shame." |
| | Male Participant: "The three things that come to mind are you got to make sure you have the trust of the community that you're working in, you know, make sure that the things that you're doing this, your agenda is aligned with them. And you also have to, I think everybody, both the community and org, everybody needs to know that the org is playing the role of support. And that's it, support. And I think that the way that you accomplish all three of those things is by making sur that there are people from that community represented or people who, who understand that community, have ties to that community, whatever it is represented inside the organization, either as a member or as an actual partner in some kind of way. |
| | Female Participant: "Well, maybe the organizations that are leading the services that are being rendered that need volunteers should be black organizations, right…. So that's part of and it really, it just goes back to the bigger issue within our community is building for ourselves and have and growing within our community so that we have a seat at the table and collectively White, Black, Hispanic, other, collectively, when we're in our communities that are homogeneous, then it's not a feeling of oh, it's this one group that came in and saved us all. It's, it's us the human race. We came together and we saved us. |
| | Female Participant: "And it really goes back to the responsibility of the organization and ourselves to, to recruit, to have people from various backgrounds, various cultures, various ethnic groups, to be representatives in this organization from top all the way to the bottom…. It's not just this one group, wasn't these group of people that came in, it was your community that came in and fed you, it was your community that came in and provided shelter, or clothing, or tutoring for your student. It was, you know, it was really a collective group of people with similar morals and similar values that made the difference." |
| | Female Participant: "I guess, one of the things would be, you know, limiting the kind of pictures you can take, or you know, that kind of thing." |
| | Female Participants: "You really can't control and the only I could see agencies that they could do, is to provide more framework to who they're serving to the volunteers. Like, if there was a mini workshop that came with |

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| | the volunteer training on implicit bias… just like changing the narrative before they even start working." |

Participants also expressed the lack of organization and preparedness by nonprofit organizations when groups of volunteers arrived for volunteer shifts. However, the nonprofit's size was not discussed. Table 6.3 displays responses about the organization and preparedness of volunteer activities.

Table 6.3: Organization and Preparedness

| Theme | Participant Response | Participant Response -Different Perspective |
|---|---|---|
| **Organization and Preparedness** | Male Participant: "I think for me, so if an organization says, 'hey, we need volunteers', cause we do so many of these things, I'm like very first thing is clear cut instruction of like what we need to do, right. So we arrive on site, like, instruct us of what we need to do. Is there some type of volunteer organization that's going on there? I think secondly, is helping the volunteers to understand the organization because some people just volunteered to do something, but they may not understand, um like the impact focus behind the organization. Um and also, all the follow-up, like right, how much of an impact did your volunteerism make, right? Who did you help today? How did you help change somebody's life, I think that's what's missed a lot of times when you leave the organization from volunteering, is that there's not a good follow-up." | Female Participant: "…the role that you signed up to do and if you say you're going to be there, you show up and do what's asked of you." |
| | Male Participant: "I'm going to say, for me, being organized, because like, I've noticed, some organizations I volunteered with, they weren't as organized. So they didn't really know what exactly we were doing. So they didn't really relay it. Like, I guess the coordinator knew we're coming but they didn't really relay it to the people who are actually there. So just kind of like starting slow unorganized. So I expect them to be a little more organized so we know exactly hey, this is exactly what you're doing at this time | Female Participant: "Okay, um…interestingly enough, I feel like I've always been on the opposite side of that. I've always been the one um, not organizing but like delegating tasks to people." |

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| | point, and not kind of jumping around, or like not knowing exactly what they have planned for us." | |
| | Male Participant: "…I recently volunteered with…but they were like, needed to bring supplies. And so it was, I'm happy that they let us know but it's also like, well, if you guys are creating this opportunity for us to volunteer, I would assume that you had the supplies ready for me and…to be able to do the job we needed to do." | Male Participant (nonprofit leader): "I don't know that we do a good enough job of creating opportunities and giving that space and encouraging people to volunteer." |
| | Female Participant: "In a formal volunteering setting, I'm expecting more that they're just a bit more organized. I think I have a little bit less patience for the disorder, or we don't know what to do with you showing up like, if they regularly, you know, have volunteers coming through, it's like, we know what we need our volunteers to do. And you know, have a bit more of an established process for intaking their volunteers and in particular, for people that are new to the organization or new to the location to just… 'hey, this is what we're doing, you know, Step A, then you'll come over her and do this, or these are the three things that we really need to get done today." | Female Participant (board member): "…it can discourage you, seeing the change, maybe even on your own board and like oh, there's young people coming, we've got to retrain them, we've got to do this, we got to learn somebody new…. Maybe sometimes the resources that you are given, whether…they don't even have to be like monetary resources, it's just resources." |
| | Female Participant: "…with formal, you just kind of assume that they already, there's already a specific thing that they want, or a path that you'll take…for the most part, I'm looking for some sort of organization and you kind of know what needs, what you're expecting of me. So once I get there, I can get to work. | Female Participant (volunteer leader): "…because when it comes to by job and what I do now, we're a small team…. Oftentimes we're at different sites, because we're stretched so thin." |
| | Male Participant: "…when we get there, be organized, have a plan for everyone because we're | Male Participant (nonprofit leader): "…I'll say it's both. |

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| | showing up as a novice, you're the expert, like, give us a path forward." | It's whoever can and will but a lot of times, you just don't want anybody to volunteer because your olunteers…you have to think about whatever demographic of individuals that you serve. You don't want that demographic of individuals to feel burdened or fee shamed upon based on the individuals that volunteer…your first thing is to protect your clients. Then the second thing is to always have someone that's volunteering and has a passion for what you're doing." |

In addition, both male and female participants reported gravitating towards volunteer activities that aligned with their skills and interests versus those activities that aligned with gender roles. For example, some male participants gravitated towards mentoring opportunities versus volunteering to help build a home. Some female participants were drawn to things of interest such as using power tools versus serving in a soup kitchen. Table 6.4 displays responses from participants regarding gender-specific volunteer activities.

Table 6.4: Gender-Specific Volunteering and Participant Responses

| Theme | Participant Response |
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| **Gendered Volunteer Work** | Male Participant: "There was only really one time, it was for a specific organization. It was a women's shelter; it was a battered women's shelter. And I remember the opportunity came up, and I thought that it was cool. But then I was kind of, I thought to myself, like, I don't know if I would even feel comfortable being a man in that space, like, because they had come from abusive…And so I sat that one out, I didn't go volunteer for it." |
| | Male Participant: "For me, no. I'm very open about volunteerism. So it could be anything, building houses, be a Habitat for Humanity build, it could be a soup kitchen, it really doesn't matter." |
| | Male Participant: "I like a mix. I prefer doing kind of a mix of things. I work in construction management. So I do like Habitat for Humanity. But I do like a mix of things like soup kitchens, um volunteering with kids, like talking to kids. I love doing that. So I just like, like to keep it diverse." |
| | Male Participant: "I'll be honest, I'm terrible with my hands…But yeah, my wheelhouse is usually with youth." |
| | Male Participant: "…I would say not gender specific tasks, if you want to relegate the task to like, what a traditional, you know, roles that certain genders do versus others, but I would say I do have a preference more so towards boys and men, if you will, just because I feel like there's a greater need in that community. But then there's also another element and this is, you know, I hate to bring this up, but it is what it is. I feel very uncomfortable working with little girls, if you will, as a man, just because it is rife with a lot of unfortunate, you know, things that happen and I know my intentions, but I also know that it's a real threat out there when it comes to, you know, sexual abuse and all the negative stuff. So for me, I just kind of keep myself away from that…just because you don't have that extra layer of someone coming in or something like that creeping into the conversation…. And again, it's not because of me, it's not because of my intentions, it's more so around just the environment in the world we live in, we got to be cognizant of that. Same thing with like, if I was going to mentor or tutor a young boy, I would do it in a public setting just as I would a girl…like sexual abuse and all that stuff doesn't care. It doesn't care about gender, per se, it is unfortunately a stain on all genders. |
| | Male Participant: "I don't know that I lean to one side or the other. I definitely appreciate the opportunity to, to work with the boys. And the truth is, boys, too…there are creeps out there who were looking at little boys too. It happens all the time, man. So yeah, it is, it is weird, sometimes getting into spaces and just having this thought that like, people perceive black men as these dangerous and nefarious creatures." |

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| | Female Participant: "Well, my, um, I know my church sometimes does things with the prison ministry. And I have thought about volunteering in spaces like that…But yeah, like as a woman, like, I didn't sign up to do that, just because I was unsure of how the situation would go or conversations or just the level of comfort there." |
| | Female Participant: "I would say I feel like I do gravitate towards I guess what will be considered more of a feminine role, you know, working with youth…. You know, like youth, something admin…like tutoring like all of those I feel like I've just gravitated more to…like I have done Habitat for Humanity. |
| | Female Participant: "I gravitate to something that's more my realm." |
| | Female Participant: "…I lean more towards like, education and planning things that are education and mentoring more female related…just because it's more comfortable." |
| | Female Participant: "…I just tend to gravitate to what's of interest, right. Or what opportunities that are presented that I feel like I can serve the greatest, like my time would serve the greatest in whatever is trying to be realized…. I've never really considered volunteering opportunities in the light of this being more gender related versus female related. I'm sorry, male related. Because when they present themselves, and it's an opportunity for my family to get together…like, it's just we're giving. We're seeking to serve in some ways." |
| | Female Participant: "I guess I've gravitated more towards the female ones, but I've always gravitated toward education. So anything that has to do with education is usually where I gravitate towards and I guess that's a predominately female industry so." |
| | Female Participant: "I don't um… I just, I'm willing to do whatever side but I guess it, the opportunities that I've had, they've never been something I wouldn't want to do but maybe maintenance. I'd be like, I don't really… I don't know but I think I'd be open to doing pretty much anything for whatever." |
| | Female Participant: "I don't do a lot of traditional roles, like I am not a feed the homeless, serving meals. I don't even like to be in a kitchen. So I know if it's not something I'm using a skill that I have, whether it's arts and craft, or I like to paint stuff. So if I'm working on a house and I can paint and do some like knickknacks stuff, I'm okay with that but yeah, the food nah, that's not me." |

**Non-Employer-Sponsored**

Along with experiences of participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities, research participants also shared experiences of participating in volunteer activities outside of

work. Experiences include the ability to connect with current friends and strengthen relationships. This finding aligns with the bonding tenet of Social Capital Theory. The participants within a shared community, in this instance friends, were able to connect and strengthen their relationship. Participants also shared the experience of establishing new relationships with those they met while volunteering. In addition, some participants experienced being viewed and treated as recipients of the nonprofit's services while serving as a volunteer. Participants noted that on occasion, they were misidentified as the recipient of services rather than a volunteer. These incidents of mistaken identity were by both staff and other volunteers of the nonprofit.

**Expectations**

Research data revealed the expectations participants had as a volunteer with nonprofit organizations. The following expectations were identified and include organizational structure and identified tasks for volunteers, communicating the onboarding process from initial interest to retention methods, and shared information about the impact of the community from the activities performed by the volunteer group. In addition, being treated as a volunteer and not an employee of the nonprofit organization includes the nonprofit organization's staff respecting the volunteer's time. Table 6.5 displays responses regarding communication.

Table 6.5: Communication

| Theme | Participant Response |
|---|---|
| **Communication** | Female Participant: "Um, publicizing it more. A lot of times, oftentimes, I've found that, with between either work or my social groups, if you don't know about it, because you weren't privy to it, you don't know that the opportunity is there…so publicizing out there more, getting more like social media active or word of mouth or community spreading the news or whatever the case may be. And I know sometimes it's difficult because oftentimes, it's just a small group of people that's putting on these projects. But the more you think about it, the more you spread the awareness, I think, and the consistency of you doing it, I think it can be an area of improvement." |
| | Male Participant: "Okay, um, I definitely feel like they should put the word out more, because I feel like that they're definitely, and not with my church because they put the word out, but just other organizations that I've been a part of, they definitely should put the word out more. And maybe, I think also, maybe like, getting some ideas from the people who are volunteering, like just ask their opinion on things and how to make it better for the next event." |
| | Female Participant: "…I think every time that there is a volunteer event or opportunity, like even after the fact, it should be posted online, and if anything, like have someone that actually participated in the event, like talk about it because a lot of things get lost and word of mouth. And I feel like once it's posted on Facebook or you know, talked about on Twitter or something, like it's out there for someone to find…so I think more of a social media presence and having the people that actually volunteered, you know, interact with it." |
| | Female Participant: "…just continue to show the benefits, personally and professionally. You know, taking the testimonials of people who have said like, 'Yes, I've been able to, you know, help my mentee get into college, but I've also gained whatever that is…" |
| | Female Participant: "…you know, maybe tie it to um, some type of like historical reference…. So like, I imagine that if I were to see an organization, articulate right or well, fully articulate that when someone like…me comes in and volunteers with this organization, here is the impact that we see. I imagine that that would, that awareness, or that type of information would move me to be like, well, dang, if I continue to do this, or I continue to participate in this way, I can help be that change. I want to be part of that…. And then maybe also, what would be helpful is kind of tying some historical references to people like me, right. And when I read or I hear about these different things about what our ancestors did it sometimes…you read it and it's great to know. But if we read it, and it's |

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| | tied to something that has alignment, and we can kind of go back to them and be like, no, not for nothing. I never knew that there was….somebody that you know, played a role in that." |

The following expectations were from participant responses during the virtual one-on-one interviews.

**Employer-Sponsored**

***Organized Structure.*** Research participants' expectations of nonprofit organizations offering volunteer activities include the organized structure of the volunteer day. The expected organization and structure include volunteer check-in procedures, identified tasks for volunteers to complete, and introducing the nonprofit organization's staff. Participants also expected to know the appointed person to direct questions and concerns about volunteer tasks and activities and ways to get involved after the group volunteer day ends. In addition, male research participants expected to assist in things requiring strength, such as moving and lifting objects. At the same time, all research participants expected the same opportunity to assist in various areas where needed.

***Identity and Respect as a Volunteer.*** Most research participants either felt respected as volunteers or did not consider respect as a barrier to volunteering. According to most research participants, many nonprofit organizations they volunteered with are understaffed and may not be as organizationally structured as corporations. In addition, nonprofit organizations may be managed by staff working in the field based on their desire to help others but lacking other skills. With these factors in mind and others such as self-awareness and self-confidence, most research

participants did not feel disrespected by the nonprofit agency staff regarding their identity as a person of color.

However, research participants did acknowledge that on occasion, they felt like the staff of nonprofit organizations treated them as if they, too, were staff, specifically in their requests for tasks to be completed. One research participant noted that on occasion, the staff of a nonprofit organization's choice of words seemed like a demand in the request for tasks to be completed versus an ask. Research participants also noted that, at times, staff of the nonprofit organizations would extend the hours of the volunteer shift, resulting in some research participants feeling blame for not continuing to volunteer past the original volunteer hours. In addition, research participants also expected nonprofit organizations to educate volunteers on implicit biases towards people of color and recipients of the services offered.

**Non-Employer-Sponsored**

While participating in non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities, research participant expectations were identical to employer-sponsored volunteer activities in organizational structure. Additional expectations include additional information regarding the onboarding process of volunteers and remaining informed about how the organization is helping positively impact the lives of those the organization serves.

***Communicating the Onboarding Process.*** According to research participants, recruitment of volunteers included email, word of mouth, and various group portals such as Employee Resource Groups and virtual volunteer and engagement boards. Once registered for the volunteer activity, research participants desired to know more about the process of becoming a volunteer. Desired information included the application process, the timeline for reviewing

applications, and whether a background check was required. In addition, participants wanted to know how the nonprofit organization intended to follow up with volunteers after the initial day of volunteering and their plan for retention of volunteers. According to one research participant, the lack of communication from the nonprofit agency regarding their volunteer needs after the initial day of volunteering symbolizes that the organization has enough volunteers for future events. Thus, this participant does not consider returning to volunteer once the employer-sponsored volunteer activity is completed.

***Communicating the Impact.*** Participant responses revealed that the level of impact their volunteer activity created is an often-over-looked attribute in attracting and retaining volunteers. Research participants indicated an interest in knowing the number of lives their volunteer activity touched and the amount of money volunteer efforts saved the organization. In addition, success stories sharing achievements and successes of the program recipients and information on joint ventures established with other nonprofit and community agencies were desired. Participants also expected the nonprofit organizations to communicate additional ways besides volunteering to help the nonprofit organization increase the number of people served. Participants are specifically expected to be invited back to volunteer. In addition, participants revealed that sharing the benefits of volunteering is a great marketing tactic and should be implemented more by nonprofit agencies.

**Gender-Specific Focus Group**

The following expectations were from participant responses during the gender-specific focus groups.

**Employer-Sponsored**

Participant responses regarding nonprofit organizations' expectations will participate in employer-sponsored and non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities were identical to those shared in the virtual one-on-one interviews. An additional expectation from male participants is the utilization of male volunteers to assist with heavy-lifting and moving. Participants mentioned that on occasion, they would see female volunteers lifting heavy boxes while volunteering. When this occurred, male participants would assist the female volunteer in the task. Figure 6.1 displays top participant responses from one-on-one interviews. Figure 6.2 displays top responses from gender-specific focus groups.

Figure 6.1 – Participant Responses

| Category | Response | Individual Participant Responses |
|---|---|---|
| Benefits – Employer-Sponsored Activities | Networking/Building Relationships | 18 |
| | Provides opportunities for advancement in career or the company | 11 |
| | Strengthens relationship with colleagues/bonding opportunities | 7 |
| | Provides a new positive view of others | 6 |
| | | |
| Benefits – Non-Employer-Sponsored Activities | Networking/Building Relationships | 21 |
| | Increased appreciation | 12 |
| | Intrinsic reward | 9 |
| | Strengthens relationships/bonding opportunities | 9 |
| | Provides a new positive view of others | 8 |
| | | |
| Challenges – Employer-Sponsored Activities | Time | 8 |
| | Capacity/Balancing various responsibilities (life, work, extracurricular) | 3 |
| | Voicing input/being heard | 2 |
| | Micro aggression /Racism | 2 |
| | | |
| Challenges – Non-Employer-Sponsored Activities | Time | 10 |
| | Lack of nonprofit organization/structure | 5 |
| | Lack of communication | 5 |
| | Lack of resources needed to participate in volunteer activity | 4 |
| | | |
| Expectations – Ways to Improve | Increase marketing/communication | 10 |
| | More organization and structure (tasks, clear directions, etc.) | 10 |
| | Go to the spaces where African Americans and African American millennials are | 7 |
| | Share the impact of the work of the organization and the support of the volunteers | 6 |

Figure 6.2 – Focus Group Responses

| Category | Response Type | Number of Participants Identified with Response |
|---|---|---|
| Identity – Does not prohibit participation in volunteering | Female Focus Group | 9 |
| | Male Focus Group | 5 |
| | | |
| Identity – Prohibits participation in volunteering | Female Focus Group | 1 |
| | Male Focus Group | 1 |
| | | |
| If time permitted, would volunteer more | Female Focus Group | 7 |
| | Male Focus Group | 6 |
| | | |
| If time permitted, would not volunteer more | Female Focus Group | 1 |
| | Male Focus Group | 0 |
| | | |
| Gender impacts volunteer activities | Female Focus Group | 1 |
| | Male Focus Group | 0 |
| | | |
| Gender does not impact volunteer activities | Female Focus Group | 7 |
| | Male Focus Group | 7 |

## Challenges and Limitations

### Employer-Sponsored Volunteer Activities

In addition to discovering the experiences and expectations of African American millennials participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities, this research also explored the challenges and limitations of such participation. Results from one-on-one interviews and focus groups, identified the following challenges and limitations,

The following challenges and limitations were from participant responses during the virtual one-on-one interviews. The challenge of finding time for participating in volunteer

activities was consistent in both the virtual one-on-one interviews and the gender-specific focus groups.

**Employer-Sponsored**

***Time.*** According to research participants, allocating the time to participate in employer-sponsored volunteer activities is challenging. Research participants desired to participate in volunteer activities presented by their employer; however, several factors determine the activity and how often they participate. Such factors include the date, time, location, and length of the volunteer activity. Additional factors include whether the volunteer activity will occur during work hours or outside of regular work hours and the time it takes to commute to and from the volunteer activity outside of regular work hours. In addition, research participants found it challenging to sign-up to participate in desired volunteer activities, noting that desired spots fill up fast and remaining spots consisted of alternate volunteer hours or required a longer commute. Participants also included balancing family and work requirements in limiting participation in employer-sponsored volunteer activities. Examples of balancing responsibilities include the ease of responding to family emergencies while volunteering and the workload, projects and deadlines, awaiting.

***The Ability to Disconnect from Work.*** Research participants identified the challenge of disconnecting to the demands and workload of their employer to participate in employer-sponsored volunteer activities. According to them, participating in employer-related volunteer activities sometimes required getting behind on a project or demanding workload. Furthermore, research participants noted that while participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities, they received work-related phone calls, responded to work emails and could not entirely focus on

participating in the volunteer activity. In addition, research participants felt like even with their group volunteer efforts, there was always more work to be done than hours in the day or hands available As a result, some research participants questioned if their participation in the volunteer activity made a difference.

***Motive Behind Volunteering.*** Participants revealed that, at times, they questioned the motive of their colleagues' participation in employer-sponsored volunteer activities and their employers' corporate social responsibility initiatives. According to participants, the questioning of the motives and intent of colleagues and their employer was prompted by the perceived actions of colleagues and executive-level team members while at the volunteer site. On occasion, research participants observed colleagues complaining about performing the needed volunteer tasks, preferring menial volunteer tasks, appearing to be performing a volunteer task only while being photographed or recorded, or being present at the volunteer activity while media was on-site. To some, the intentions and motives of their colleagues appeared insincere and a challenge to future participation.

An additional challenge expressed by participants includes taking caution when participating in events with children or persons considered part of a vulnerable population group. For example, men volunteering with children and interacting with young girls. Although mentoring and youth empowerment was important for male research participants, they were always aware of their surroundings, movements, and how their actions were perceived. Female research participants did not include such awareness in terms of interacting with population groups.

**Non-Employer-Sponsored Volunteer Activities**

***Time.*** Much like the challenge of participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities, research participants identified allocating time as a limitation to participating in non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities. According to research participants, finding the balance of managing home life and responsibilities, maintaining social relationships, and participating in civic, religious, and community events leave little room for additional participation in formal volunteer activities. For most research participants, commitment to participate in formal volunteer activities outside of work took planning and preparation and at times resulted in non-participation depending on the advertised volunteer location (involving commute time), volunteer day, and hours required for commitment for participation. According to the research participant responses in the focus groups, most respondents indicated they would volunteer more if time permitted.

***Sense of Belonging.*** The sense of belonging was a prevalent theme in participant responses. Per participant feedback, feelings of being ignored by the staff of nonprofit agencies, racist comments by fellow volunteers, lack of connection with other volunteers, and lack of communication and engagement fostered a sense of alienation during the volunteer experience. In addition, research participants expressed the lack of a big group of volunteers, usually when they participated in volunteer activities by themselves versus friends, resulting in decreased feeling. Participants also expressed somewhat shocking treatment from other volunteers. According to some participants, this type of treatment was usually from a person who did not identify as someone of color. Participants noted that on occasion, a fellow volunteer would assume that the research participant was a receiver of the services offered by the nonprofit

organization for which they were volunteering. On one occasion, a participant was handed a food bag by a fellow volunteer while packing food for distribution at a food center.

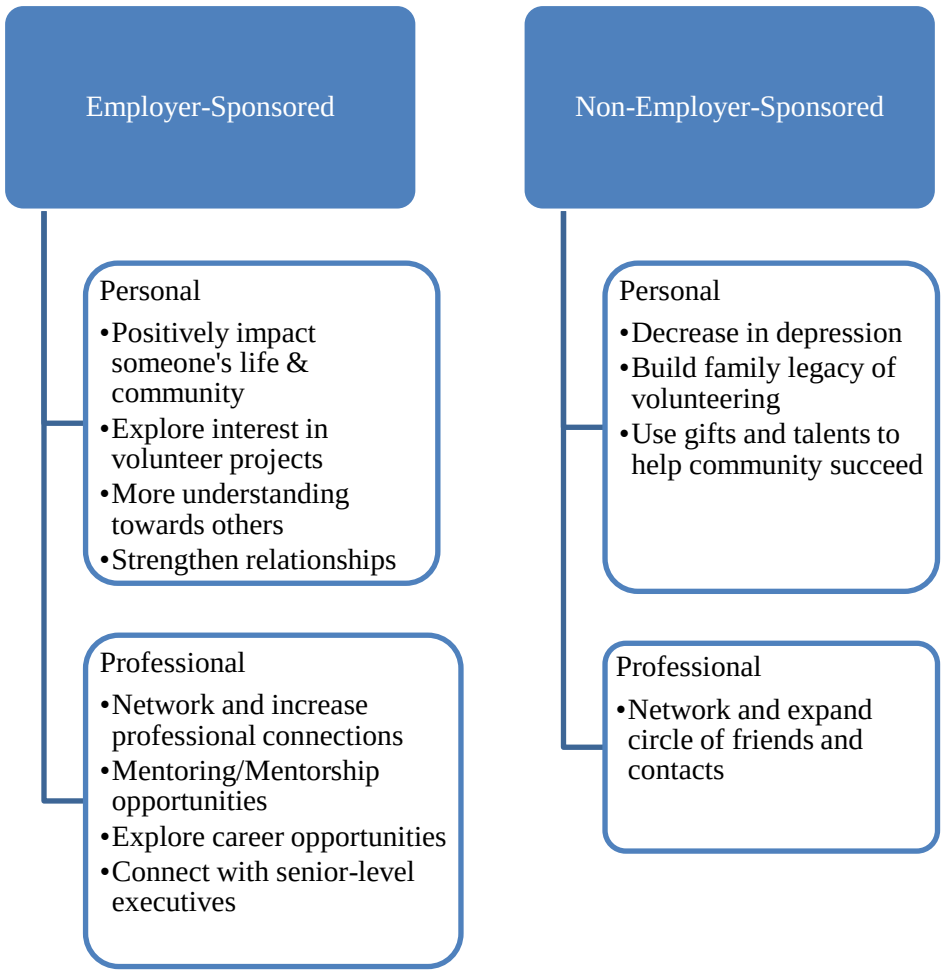
***Finding Volunteer Opportunities.*** Per participants, volunteering outside of employer-sponsored activities requires a lot more searching of opportunities. One participant noted seeing a billboard with a volunteer opportunity whereas, she had not heard about the opportunity through any networks or circles she belonged. Research participants noted that in some cases when they find a volunteer opportunity, additional information on how to sign-up, how to contact for more info, etc., is not available. As a result, they may forego participating for lack of information.

Additional challenges and limitations include the volunteer agency staff's lack of organization and structure and the perception that the language (including tone and volume) used by staff was disrespectful. In addition, recruiting others to join the volunteer activity, feeling that their suggestions were not heard or accepted, not having the resources or tools needed to participate in a volunteer activity (i.e., the volunteer responsible for providing supplies), and feeling that ethnic or cultural volunteer groups may not support formal volunteering opportunities were challenges expressed by participants.

**Benefits and Opportunities**

Through the data obtained through online surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups, benefits and opportunities found within volunteering were present in both employer-sponsored and non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities.

Figure 6.3 – Benefits and Opportunities




**Employer-Sponsored Volunteer Activities**

According to research participants, the benefits and opportunities of participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities fall within two themes: personal and career-oriented.

***Personal Benefits.*** Personal benefits obtained through volunteering include a personal motivation to do more. For research participants, motivation to volunteer was influenced by positively impacting someone's life, impacting the community, and exploring interests in volunteer projects never experienced before. In addition, through volunteering, participants

noticed a change in their view of life. Participants noted having a greater appreciation towards the life they lived and the things they had been given. Additional personal benefits associated with participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities included increasing the desire to be more understanding towards others, feelings of intrinsic values and rewards to include strengthening relationships, contributing to personal goals and development, and the ability to network and expand one's circle of contacts. The personal benefits identified by participants echo the tenets of Social Capital Theory in providing opportunities for bonding, bridging, and linking among participants who volunteer.

***Career-Related Benefits***. Responses from research participants identified career-related benefits and opportunities gained through volunteering. Such benefits include the ability to network and increase professional connections, obtain access to mentoring and mentorship opportunities, and the ability to explore career opportunities. Additional career-related benefits associated with participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities include the ability to develop new skills, connect with senior-level executives outside of the workspace, and receive recognition for community volunteer efforts. In addition, research participants felt that their volunteering was performing meaningful, life-impacting work that directly positively impacted the people the organization served. The professional benefits identified by participants echo the bonding tenet of Social Capital Theory. Participants were able to connect with individuals and groups of power and influence to help advance their career aspirations.

**Non-Employer-Sponsored Volunteer Activities**

In addition to the benefits and opportunities of participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities, research respondents also identified benefits associated with non-employer-

sponsor volunteer activities. Such benefits include decreasing depression, building the family legacy of volunteering, creating a sense of belonging, and creating memories. Additional benefits include having a lasting impact on one's life, exploring ways to use gifts and talents to help the next generation of community members, students, and leaders succeed, and the ability to network and expand one's circle of friends and contacts. These benefits echo the tenets of Social Capital Theory, specifically the bonding tenet. The sense of belonging experienced by participants helps strengthen the bonds of the community, thus the bonding tenet, and allow additional partnerships and relationships to be fostered that also reflect the bridging and linking tenets of Social Capital Theory.

## Male and Female Volunteering

In addition to exploring the volunteer experiences of African American millennials, this research also explored the role gender played in the volunteer experience. Based on virtual one-on-one interviews and gender-specific focus group responses, the following themes were identified.

***Self-Awareness While Volunteering.*** Research participants identifying as male stated that they were more aware of their identity as Black males when considering participation in a volunteer experience. Self-awareness and self-consideration were present when considering the volunteer activity and tasks, the recipients of the volunteer services rendered, and the nonprofit agency or organization responsible for the volunteer activity. For example, when considering volunteering for an organization providing mentoring to students, providing after-school care, assisting with day camp activities, or volunteering at a domestic abuse center, male research participants preferred working with male students or participants. In addition, male respondents

would request another female volunteer or staff member's assistance when they felt needed and preferred to do activities in group settings. However, research participants identifying as female did not feel the need to be as self-aware as African American or black women while volunteering. According to one participant, society does not fear black women like they fear black men. The exception to the female participants being self-aware occurred when the volunteer activity included night or evening activities or when the volunteer activity included an all-male demographic due to safety concerns. For example, one participant desired to participate in a volunteer activity at a correctional facility. However, due to the facility being an all-male facility, she chose not to volunteer.

***Personal Interest Over Gender Roles.*** When considering volunteer activities, both male and female research participants indicated that they preferred participating in activities of interest. Such activities allowed participants to use skills, talents, and knowledge, and activities that resonate with the volunteer as an individual. For example, some male participants preferred volunteering with activities that include mentoring students rather than participating in activities that required tools. Some female research participants preferred doing something different, like using tools to build a home versus serving in a soup kitchen. In addition, both female and male research participants were willing to explore different opportunities in volunteering and not be confined to only participating in volunteer activities specific to gender roles.

***Volunteers Not Dictated by Gender Roles.*** According to Wemlinger and Berlan (2016), the traditional role of women influenced their volunteer activities. In addition, Rotolo and Wilson (2007) and Messner and Bozada-Deas (2009) argued that because of gender roles, men participated in volunteer activities that included building and maintenance. However, this

research revealed that women and men preferred participating in volunteer activities of interest and using a skill or talent versus the tasks associated with gender roles. However, male and female participants participated in some volunteer activities that coincided with traditional gender roles. For example, female participants were involved in religious groups, human services, and educational organizations (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Male participants also performed board service (Rotolo & Wilson, 2007) and sports and recreation groups (Musick & Wilson, 2008).

***Informal Volunteering Is Community-Centered.*** According to Putnam (2000), informal volunteering is individualistic, whereas formal volunteering involves participating in community-centered projects. Einolf et al. (2016) described informal volunteering as volunteer activities not coordinated by organizations or institutions. However, volunteer activities outside of work included community food drives, back-to-school drives, community clean-up, disaster relief, and tutoring at local schools. Participant responses revealed that participants volunteered with community organizations, civic clubs, Greek fraternities, sororities, religious institutions, and schools.

***Volunteer Motivations Driven by Personal Interests.*** Pearce (1993) argued that the reasons why and benefits of volunteering varied by person. This research data found this to be consistent in that each participant was motivated to volunteer for various reasons personal to them. Some of those reasons were echoed among other participants, such as the ability to positively impact someone's life for the better, improve the community, and make connections. However, each person found a reason to continue volunteering even when they changed companies and cities. For some participants, the benefit of connecting with others through

volunteering allowed them to create a circle of friends when they relocated to a new city or state. For some, volunteering was modeled as a way of life during their upbringing. And for some, volunteering was introduced at a later age, but the benefit of giving back is the same for them.

### Collective Responses in Focus Groups

Common responses from the focus groups were identified through coding and repetition found within participant responses. Collective responses of the volunteer experience, found from the gender-specific focus groups, were expectations of volunteer activities, specifically having an organized structure of work when volunteers go to serve, receiving respect and identity as a volunteer, communicating the onboarding process for the volunteer work, and communicating the impact of the activity on the community by the nonprofit. The challenge that all the focus group participants discussed was time – lack of time or not having enough time to participate. Another common experience centered around participating in volunteer activities of interest versus gender-specific volunteering work. In addition, many focus group participants experienced some form of savior complex while volunteering.

### Additional Findings

Although this research focused on the experiences, benefits, and challenges associated with formal volunteering, the researcher felt it was important to mention two components for future study: informal volunteering and the impact of COVID-19 on volunteer efforts.

### Informal Volunteering

According to Musick and Wilson (2008), there are two forms of volunteering, formal and informal. The latter is commonly expressed through the actions of neighbors helping neighbors. According to the responses, informal volunteering is present throughout their volunteer

experiences. It includes volunteering with religious organizations, local and community organizations including school-related and political volunteering, international volunteering, and volunteering with cultural organizations including Greek sororities and fraternities, the Urban League, and the NAACP. On a few occasions, research participants did not consider their involvement and service with these organizations as volunteering. However, simply a way of life passed down from family members and the community they grew up and lived in. Future research includes exploring and increasing the awareness of informal volunteering and the benefits of such acts of service within communities of color.

## Chapter 7: Discussion

The purpose of this research was to identify the experiences and expectations of African American millennials participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities, challenges and limitations within volunteering, the benefits and opportunities afforded through volunteering, and ways nonprofit organizations can improve the volunteer experience. Twenty-nine respondents from five states consisting of sixteen females and thirteen males participated in online surveys and one-on-one interviews, providing insight into their volunteer experience. Of these respondents, eight females and seven males also participated in four focus groups, two per gender, and shared additional information about their volunteer experience.

As discussed in the methodology, the data were coded, analyzed, and presented based on the research questions based on the qualitative research design. The data was then organized to identify themes in response to the outlined research questions. The research questions that shaped this study were:

1. What are the experiences and expectations of African American millennials that participate in formal volunteering opportunities?
2. What are the challenges and limitations experienced by African American millennials participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities?
3. What are the challenges and limitations experienced by African American millennials participating in non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities?
4. What are the social benefits and opportunities created through formal volunteering experiences? What are its implications?

These research questions were investigated, and the findings were presented in the previous chapter. The data shows that the volunteer experience and expectations for African American millennials are broken down between employer-sponsored and non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities.

**Employer-Sponsored Volunteer Activities**

The experiences participants had of nonprofit and volunteer organizations varied. For most respondents, participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities was not mandatory but strongly encouraged. In addition, participants felt the need always to be professional and not relaxed in volunteer settings. At times, participants questioned the authenticity of their colleagues' participation in volunteer activity, noting that participation seemed to be more about photo opportunities than assisting with the volunteer activity or help make a positive difference in the lives served by the nonprofit organization. Last, participants valued the opportunity given by the volunteer activity to connect with others and strengthen relationships.

Participant expectations of the nonprofit organization while volunteering with employer-sponsored activities also varied. Expectations participants have of these organizations include being organized and providing identified tasks for volunteers to complete. The organization also includes introducing the staff and other volunteers, volunteer check-in procedures, whom to contact for questions, and ways to get involved in the future. Additional expectations include communicating the onboarding process to include the length of time from application submission to volunteer onboarding, communicating the volunteer activity impact on the recipient of the services provided, and being identified and respected as a volunteer. In some instances, volunteers were mistaken for recipients of the services offered by the nonprofit organization.

The benefits associated with participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities are categorized as either personal or career. Such benefits include the motivation to give back, experiencing a positive change in their outlook on life, desiring to understand others, exploring activities of interest that they may not have previously had the opportunity to participate in, and networking and expanding their circle of contacts.

The challenges associated with participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities included similar responses to non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities, including lack of time and finding volunteer opportunities. Additional challenges presented were the ability to disconnect from the office's work to be fully present for the volunteer activity and the authenticity of the desire to volunteer to help someone in need or to have one's photo taken just for the credit of helping the less fortunate.

**Non-Employer Sponsored Volunteer Activities**

The benefits associated with participating in non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities were more so personal in nature. Such benefits include building the family's volunteering legacy, creating a sense of belonging, and creating memories. Additional benefits include a more positive outlook on life, including a decrease in depression, positively impacting someone's life and the community, networking and expanding the circle of friends, and exploring ways to use talent to help someone succeed better in the community.

In addition, participants noted their motivation to impact the lives of other individuals, impact the community, and continue traditions of giving back modeled by parents and other members of the community. In addition, the expectations of the volunteer experience draw from values that respondents thought were essential for recruitment, retention, and expansion. The

research also found that African American millennials face challenges in participating in employer-sponsored and non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities. Albeit some of the challenges in participating are different for the two areas of volunteer activities, a few of the challenges are the same. The data also shows that African American millennials benefit from participating in both employer-sponsored and non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities; however, respondents perceive the benefits of volunteering with non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities of more outstanding merit. Last, according to respondents, there is room for improvement and growth regarding ways nonprofit organizations can improve the volunteer experience, including outreach, methods of inclusion, and implementation of suggestions found in conversing and partnering with African American millennials and members of communities of color.

**Important Elements**

This chapter analyzes and interprets the findings of this study. The structure of this chapter is organized based on four categories:

- The role informal volunteering plays in African American millennials' expectations of nonprofit organizations and all other volunteer experience (research questions 1 and 4).
- The relevance of social capital theory principles to the received and expected benefits of volunteering (research questions 1 and 4)
- The relevance of social capital theory principles to the challenges of volunteering (research questions 2 and 3)

- The role of social capital theory in overcoming barriers to inclusion and engagement of African American millennials by nonprofit organizations (research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4)

This chapter will discuss how the experiences shared by research participants provide a better understanding of the volunteer experience of African American millennials. Throughout the interviews and the focus groups, common themes emerged among the respondents regarding the introduction to informal volunteering at various ages in life and the benefits obtained through informal volunteering. These themes shed light on the gap in the literature on the role and benefits of informal volunteering and a possible limitation to the career benefits associated with formal volunteering. For many in the African American or black community, volunteering is a cultural and learned behavior passed down from generation to generation. To the extent that some respondents did not know that their acts of kindness were considered volunteering. In addition, most respondents saw volunteering as a networking tool. In addition, volunteering was not viewed as an opportunity for career advancement but rather as a tool to connect with people from all aspects of life.

**The role informal volunteering plays in African American millennials' expectations of nonprofit organizations and all other volunteer experience.**

Research on formal volunteering is more readily available than that on informal volunteering. According to Ertas (2016), research on informal volunteering is scarce, and according to Putnam (2000), informal volunteer activities are not often recognized by society. Responses obtained from research participants show that informal volunteering is a cultural, familial, or communal expectation for many respondents. For many respondents, their exposure

and involvement in volunteering were expected. In addition, once exposed to volunteering, no matter the age, respondents desired to participate in opportunities to volunteer, give back, impact someone's life, and better the community. As a result of this volunteering exposure and culture, research participants often did not expect the event organizer, host entity, or volunteer leader to have structure.

However, research participants had different expectations when participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities organized by an organization or person outside of the community, church, or civic group. When participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities, respondents' responses revealed that their expectations of the nonprofit organization and the volunteer experience were based on their view of what established companies and organizations should provide. Because the employer-sponsored volunteer activity was promoted through their employer, research participants expected the nonprofit agency to be more organized, structured, and prepared when volunteers arrived on site. Such organization, structure, and preparedness include being greeted and introduced to the staff, a volunteer coordinator or manager giving clear goals and instructions, having enough work to be done for the number of volunteers present, being able to tell the story of their organization, and being able to educate volunteers regarding unconscious bias towards the recipients of the services provided by the nonprofit agency.

Respondents' expectations for formal and informal volunteering align with the definition of informal volunteering as outlined by Musick and Wilson (2008). Informal volunteering activities occur outside of the organizational context, whereas formal volunteering is considered more organizational. As a result, research participants did not expect the same organization,

structure, and preparedness when volunteering with their church or civic group; volunteers run most volunteer events with these groups. In contrast, research participants expected nonprofit organizations to have staff responsible for the organization, structure, and preparedness for volunteering. In addition, for some research participants, formal volunteering also provided an additional opportunity to impact someone's life and the community they serve through a financial gift made possible through volunteer matching programs. For example, some research participants would volunteer with Organization A and then submit their volunteer hours to their employer, who would donate to Organization B on behalf of the research participant. Because of this addition, research participants further equated participation in formal volunteer activities with being more business-like in structure.

**The Relevance of Social Capital Theory Principles to the Received and Expected Benefits**

According to Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), Lin (2002), and Putnam (2000), the foundation of social capital is based on the building and use of social relationships to create benefits such as personal goals, career goals, and access to information. According to research participants, benefits obtained through volunteering were categorized as either personal or career related. Personal benefits identified include motivation to impact someone's life and the community, exploring ways to use gifts, talents, knowledge, and a sense of belonging, and connecting with others with the same interests. Others include networking and expanding one's circle of friends and contacts; decreasing depression and having a more positive view on life and one's upbringing and developing the ability to view others in a more positive light, including being more understanding of the needs of the others and practicing a greater level of patience.

In addition, having access to mentoring opportunities to help the generations to come, mentorship opportunities for career aspirations, exposure to new things, and developing new skills as an avenue to explore other career opportunities. Others include an increase in connections found through networking, including the ability to connect and interact with senior-level executives and glean insight and guidance, receiving recognition for their volunteering efforts, and contributing a monetary donation through their employer's volunteer hour match program.

As outlined by research participants, these benefits support the social capital theory, as Gannon and Roberts (2018) defined as the networks that enable collective action with the desired goal of mutual benefit. In this regard, volunteering is mutually beneficial. It provides meaningful benefits to the volunteer and the nonprofit agency or other entity within the network for which the volunteer is assisting.

**The Relevance of Social Capital Theory Principles to Volunteering Challenges**

According to Gannon and Roberts (2018), the social capital theory also captures the access individuals have to resources and the quality of the resources for which these individuals have access. Based on responses of research participants, access to resources when participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities is limited based on several factors: time, registering for the desired volunteer activity, the inability to disconnect from work, and the uncertainty of the motive behind the volunteer activity. For most respondents, having the time to participate in volunteering activities was a significant challenge. For some, the volunteer commute from their home or office to the volunteer site was a challenge. In addition, at times, the volunteer activity

occurred on the weekend or during non-traditional work hours, which was viewed as a limitation to access to the potential benefits associated with volunteering.

Research participants also viewed volunteering on the desired project as a challenge due to limited volunteer spots. As a result, volunteer spots were on a first-come, first-served basis leaving respondents unable to access potential resources and benefits such as building new or strengthening existing relationships, learning new skills, or exploring other career opportunities.

Research participant responses also reflected the inability to disconnect from work as a challenge. In this instance, research participants were not engaged in the volunteer activity compared to other volunteers due to having to be accessible for work-related projects, questions, and concerns, including responding to work calls and emails while at the volunteer site. As a result, research participants did not have access to network or connect with other professionals, increasing their circle of influence or being invited to access other circles of influence.

Research participants' responses showed a lack of trust regarding the company or organization's motive behind having employees participate in volunteer activities. On occasion, research participants recalled being asked to switch tasks that limited their exposure to and ability to connect with others. For example, being asked to leave the welcome or sign-in table and assist with packing so that another volunteer of a certain age or ethnicity could greet visitors, witnessing senior-level executives attend the media segment of the volunteer opportunity but not be actively engaged in assisting with any of the tasks, and experience racial comments and acts of implicit bias either directed towards them or persons of the same ethnicity. As a result, such actions limited the research participants' ability to foster connections and build relationships due to the lack of security and trustworthiness found within such environments.

**The Role of Social Capital Theory in Overcoming Barriers to Inclusion and Engagement of African American Millennials by Nonprofit Organizations**

According to Putnam (2000), social capital is accumulated through everyday social interactions; therefore, the more a person engages with another person, their wealth of social capital also increases. Based on the three tenets of social capital theory: bonding, bridging, and linking, opportunities exist for nonprofit agencies to connect with African American millennials to overcome barriers to inclusion and engagement of and by this population group.

For research participants, opportunities exist for nonprofit agencies to connect with African American millennials and their communities. However, respondents desire authenticity in character and request, including visiting where this population group congregates, including salons, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, community events, and religious institutions. For some respondents, authenticity in request means the non-person of color leading volunteer efforts for the nonprofit agency attending events and sharing opportunities with residents. Other examples of authenticity shared by research participants include nonprofit agencies being culturally sensitive to the history and challenges of the community, the volunteers, and this population group, including educating staff and volunteers about implicit bias, white savior complex, and the exploitation of the population served. Ultimately, research participants shared a desire to be invited, feel welcomed once they get there, and be informed about opportunities to stay connected while recruiting others to be a part.

# Chapter 8: Conclusion

For African American millennials, much like many other groups, volunteering is a learned behavior (Einolf, 2016) and participation in volunteer activities is cultural, familial, communal (Musick & Wilson, 2008), and religious (Ozorak, 1989) inexperience. For many, exposure to volunteering starts at home with parents and with members and organizations of the community. This research explored the volunteering experiences of African American millennials. In addition, this research focused on the experiences and expectations experienced by African Americans in participating in formal volunteering opportunities, the challenges and limitations of participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities by African American millennials, the challenges and limitations of participating in non-employer-sponsored volunteer activities by African American millennials, and the social benefits and opportunities created through formal volunteering as well as its implications.

The benefits and challenges of volunteering, specifically when participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities, support existing research that identifies intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. Such benefits include connections (Snyder & Omoto, 2008), internal rewards and feelings (Menchik & Weisbrod, 1987), and connection to the community (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). In addition, this research revealed that participating in employer-sponsored volunteer activities and non-employer-sponsored activities brings opportunities and provide benefits essential to the development of one's social capital, including the relationships established and the access to and type of resources provided. However, challenges are also present in the volunteer experience. Participation in employer-sponsored volunteer activities includes a barrier to social capital due to the lack of inclusion and the feeling of not belonging.

## Researcher Conclusions

In addition to findings previously discussed, the researcher concludes that this exploratory study of the volunteer experiences of African American millennials produced results that suggest that volunteering within the African American community is, at the core, communal and familial in nature. Acts of volunteering, both informal and formal, are prevalent within the African American community and expressed through various organizations such as religious, educational, and cultural. Volunteering is also a part of African American family traditions and legacies. In addition, volunteering among African American millennials is driven by personal interest and the level of impact of their service on the community. The benefits of volunteering with formal organizations supports existing literature however, such benefits are also mirrored in informal volunteering. Challenges associated with volunteering include lack of time, a sense of belonging within certain spaces outside of one's established community or network, and feelings of savior complex while service underserved communities.

For nonprofit and volunteer organizations, this research provides insight and recommendations for recruiting and sustaining volunteer participation. For employers with social responsibility and volunteer initiatives, this research provides insight into the volunteer experience and recommendations on how to increase employee participation in volunteer activities. For the volunteer, this research provides insight into the lived experiences of this population group, including the benefits and challenges, and recommendations for ways to connect with nonprofit and volunteer organizations of interest.

## Limitations

This research is not without its limitations. The major limitations include the role of the researcher and the impact of the global pandemic: COVID-19.

**Role of the Researcher**

Due to the personal component of a qualitative design method, the researcher must disclose and clarify personal bias regarding the subject (Creswell, 2002). The researcher identifies as an African American millennial, has volunteered with nonprofits such as Union Gospel Mission, Dallas Life Shelter, the Boys and Girls Club, Celebrate Shi – a women's empowerment organization, and AAU basketball. Additionally, the researcher has professionally managed volunteers for Habitat for Humanity, Dallas County Community College District, and the Stars and Beyond Program. The researcher's volunteer and work experiences as an African American, millennial female at the aforementioned organizations led to this research topic.

In addition, this study was conducted by a person identifying as an African American millennial. This may produce a bias; however, the researcher intentionally allowed the research participants to freely share their volunteer experiences to show themes among all research participants and reduce any researcher’s personal bias.

**Generalizability**

The number of survey respondents consisted of 30 individuals from over five states. The sample set for this research is small and although it provides insight into the topic, it cannot be generalizable. Data gathering a larger sample size would assist in making this research more generalizable.

**The Impact of COVID-19**

Research on the volunteer experiences of African American millennials began before 2020; however, data collection occurred in 2020. As a result, research participant responses include references to the challenges of volunteering during COVID-19. Such challenges include being prohibited to volunteer in-person, transitioning to virtual volunteering, and in some cases, ceasing all forms of volunteering known to the research participant. Future research exploring COVID-19 played in nonprofit agencies and volunteer organization's ability to engage volunteers through non-traditional or in-person methods. Data collection for this research occurred during the global pandemic COVID-19 with individuals who would have qualified to participate in the research study. In addition, connecting with research participants who participated in the research study presented an additional challenge. Most of these individuals balanced working from home while managing virtual learning for their children at home. In addition, finding the best time for research participants to participate in focus groups was challenging as it required accommodating the respondent's already busy and varied schedules. As a result of these challenges induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer individuals chose to participate and complete the study. It should be noted that additional participant interview responses could enhance the results of this study. However, the findings remain significant.

**Implications for Research & Practice:**

The findings of this study focused on the volunteer experiences of African American millennials, ages 24-39. The following implications benefit nonprofit and volunteer organizations, offices of corporate and social responsibility initiatives, and volunteers.

**Volunteer-Volunteer and Volunteer-Organization Connections**

The implications are that volunteering builds connections between volunteer-volunteer and organization-volunteer. Nonprofit organizations must connect with non-white, non-female volunteers, including frequenting the places where members of these groups socialize. In addition, volunteers must seek opportunities to connect with organizations outside of their communities to establish relationships, build rapport, and bridge gaps.

**A Change in Traditional Volunteering**

The implications are that the traditional view of volunteering is not conducive to attracting and retaining a younger volunteer base. Volunteers of today and tomorrow desire flexibility and fluidity in volunteer days, shorter volunteer hours, various volunteer shifts, and tasks not tied to gender roles.

**Informal Volunteering**

The implications are that giving back and helping others are embedded within the core African American or black communities. Although not formally studied as vast as formal volunteering, informal volunteering is happening every day in communities. It is vital for Nonprofit organizations desiring to partner with the residents and organizations of these communities to acknowledge the informal volunteering already in existence and work to build on the foundation established.

**White-Savior Complex**

The implications are that the white-savior complex is subtle but evident in all mixed-race, mixed-culture, and mixed-community volunteer efforts. Stemming from an unconscious bias that inhibits inclusion and connectedness between African American millennial volunteers and non-black nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations, corporate and social responsibility

initiatives, and volunteers must dismantle unconscious bias that feeds into the white-savior complex.

**Recommendations**

The current opportunities for involvement and engagement offered by nonprofit organizations are limited and lack well-thought-out action plans. Not only are volunteers needing and desiring to connect with the community, but so do nonprofit agencies (Synder & Omoto, 2008). Nonprofit agencies must be intentional about marketing volunteer opportunities, retaining volunteers, and engaging African American millennials to be sustainable in the future. In addition, nonprofit agencies will need to incorporate training to volunteers that include implicit bias, renouncing the white savior complex, and reducing exploitation of the population served.

There are great benefits and staggering challenges associated with volunteering. However, the benefits should outweigh the challenges. In partnership, nonprofit agencies and community members, including African American millennials, can improve the overall volunteer experience. Participant response data identified the following conclusions: a need for increased marketing and communication from nonprofit organizations, increased community inclusion and involvement, and a review of the volunteer experience.

The desire for increased marketing and communication stems from research participants' lack of knowledge of where to locate volunteer opportunities, the volunteer onboarding process, volunteer procedures, and ways to remain engaged as a volunteer. An increase in community inclusion and involvement results from research participants' role as volunteers and their desire to have a sense of belonging, inclusion, and connectedness between the community, community

organizations, and nonprofit partners. And a review of the volunteer experience centers around the desire for flexibility in volunteer hours, volunteer days, and length of the volunteer shift.

**Increase Marketing and Communication**

Marketing and communication techniques and approaches from nonprofit organizations have room for growth. Research participants who participated in employer-sponsored volunteer activities had ways to sign up for participation through employer-led sites. However, outside of participating with their employer, research participants expressed difficulty identifying ways nonprofit agencies need volunteers, ways to sign-up for volunteer activities, and the volunteer onboarding process. Research participants were also interested in knowing the impact their participation had on the lives of individuals served, the community, and the nonprofit agency. Ways to increase marketing and communication from nonprofit and volunteer agencies involve sharing the story. This can be done using social media platforms to increase engagement and promote volunteer opportunities and volunteer benefits. In addition, through story-telling, nonprofit organizations can tell the why, what, work, and impact of the organization while maintaining transparency regarding funds raised, services delivered, participants served, and future needs and goals.

**Increase Community Inclusion and Involvement**

An increase in the efforts made by nonprofit and volunteer organizations to include residents of the communities they serve is needed. Per research data and analysis, nonprofit organizations can create a sense of belonging by creating a culture of inclusion within their organization and their volunteer efforts, recruiting members of the communities served to help advocate for the organization's work, and knowing the history and goals of the communities

served by the organization. Nonprofit organizations must be aware of and understand any historical and racial context surrounding the communities served to engage and work in partnership with the communities. By embracing the community's culture, attending community events, and developing relationships with local businesses, nonprofit organizations can help foster a collaborative and inclusive environment.

**Enhance the Volunteer Experience**

The third implication of this research revolved around the individual volunteer experience. According to responses by research participants, the following are suggestions for how nonprofit agencies and volunteer organizations can enhance the volunteer experience. These suggestions include being authentic in the desire to have more people of color volunteering with the organization, providing a follow-up to volunteers, informing volunteers of the impact of their support, and diversifying the organization's leadership to include people of color and a diverse age group. Others include rules limiting exploitation of the clients, having dedicated staff to ensure a smooth volunteer experience, reassessing how nonprofit agencies treat their clients compared to the volunteers to have fair treatment of all persons, and having flexible volunteer days, hours, and tasks.

**Recommendations for Nonprofit Organizations**

Research participant's responses reflect recommendations from respondents beneficial in recruiting and retaining African American millennials and, ultimately, a broader base of volunteers. Based on these responses, the following are recommendations.

Table 8.1: Recommendations

| Recommendation | Description | Possible Outcomes |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Increase efforts to include African American millennial volunteers. | • Community and culture-centered engagement practices that show intentionality in recruiting and involving African American millennials | • A better understanding of the needs and desires of this population group.<br>• A better understanding of the ways to positively impact the community and partner with other organizations<br>• Identify needs and generate programming based on the feedback of the community.<br>• Increase in knowledge, awareness, and approaches that can benefit all working in the field, including nonprofit agencies, volunteer agencies, government agencies, and funders. |
| 2. Increase communication efforts with stakeholders to show the impact of their work. | • Strategic marketing and communication practices provide ways to engage, the benefits of volunteering, and the impact. | • Increase in understanding the volunteer process from initial interest to retention methods.<br>• Increase in interest in volunteer and funding opportunities.<br>• Encourage volunteering at all ages and cycles of life. |
| 3. Restructuring of volunteer opportunities. | • Expansion of and flexibility in volunteer opportunities. | • Increase in volunteer interest based on the availability of the volunteers' schedule.<br>• Expansion of volunteer opportunities.<br>• Increase in organization's impact and reach. |
| 4. Increase efforts to reduce stigmatizing clients and people of color. | • Implement a policy that encourages diversity, equity, and inclusion and that promotes the dignity of clients. | • Increase in the sense of belonging when volunteering.<br>• Reduce "savior" mentality.<br>• Increase the number of individuals desiring to partner with the organization. |

First, an increase in the efforts of nonprofit organizations to include African American millennials is essential. Organizations must be intentional in their efforts to recruit and retain this population group. Intentionality may be in the form of partnering with the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Pan-Hellenic Greek organizations, The Urban League, religious institutions, as well as attending community cultural events such as the Martin Luther King (M.L.K.) festival, Juneteenth celebration, etc.

Second, communication surrounding the volunteer experience, the benefits afforded to the volunteer, and the impact made are essential to this population group. Nonprofit organizations must be strategic in their marketing and communication efforts. Examples may include creating accounts and developing engaging content on popular social media platforms like Tik Tok, Instagram, and Facebook. It is also essential for these social media accounts to follow, tag, and support other influencers and organizations that influence the population group. In addition, marketing techniques may include table sponsorships at community fairs and events and distributing fliers, etc., at community and cultural events. Last, nonprofit organizations are encouraged to connect with influencers, leaders in the community, and anyone interested in spreading the word and work of the organization within the African American community and among African American millennials.

Third, the ability to allocate time to volunteer is a challenge for many volunteers. It is recommended that nonprofit organizations restructure the volunteer experience to include virtual and in-person volunteer opportunities, expand volunteer times, volunteer for a two-hour time frame, and expand the volunteer day, including options before and after traditional work hours.

Last, an increase in volunteer policy and a change in organizational culture is recommended. Research participant responses identified a sense of belonging being needed in the volunteer experience and the mistaken identity of being a recipient of the services offered to the organization while serving as a volunteer. Ways to increase volunteer policy and change organizational culture include developing policies and procedures that educate all volunteers on the importance of the organization's mission and work, the definition of and ways to reduce implicit bias, and develop practices that reduce barriers to inclusion. Methods to increase policy and organizational culture changes include the use of video to share expectations regarding participating in the volunteer experience to include appropriate and inappropriate behavior and comments, the introduction of all volunteers at the beginning of the volunteer activity, as well as continuing exploring and practicing efforts to improve the overall volunteer experience for all parties involved.

**Recommendations for Volunteers**

Data from the research showed areas beneficial to volunteers, nonprofit and volunteer organizations, and employers that organize volunteer activities for their employees. Recommendations for volunteers include ways to be actively engaged with the nonprofit organization. Including signing up to receive newsletters and other notices from the organization, following the organization on its social media pages, and contacting the organization inquiring about available volunteer opportunities. In addition, joining local and virtual social media groups dedicated to promoting volunteer opportunities, conducting an online search on volunteer and nonprofit interests, utilizing networks and connections to discover ways to be more engaged.

**Recommendations for Employers**

Responses gathered in this research study allow for recommendations for employers who sponsor or organize volunteer activities for their employees. Recommendations to assist with employee participation in volunteer activities include a centralized location and method to locate and sign-up for available volunteer opportunities and share the benefits of volunteering with company colleagues to include possible job promotion, networking opportunities, and the ability to learn new skills. Additional recommendations include providing time allocated within the employee's schedule or workday to volunteer, providing various organizations to volunteer with, following up with employees after the volunteer event, and sharing their volunteer efforts' impact.

**Future Research**

The results of this study allowed room for future research to explore further topics associated with the volunteer experience. Opportunities exist for further research exploring the role informal volunteering plays in how the African American community views volunteerism, specifically the benefits and challenges of this volunteering among this population group. Future research on the exploration of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices, especially that of social responsibility programs within major corporations, and their role in the volunteer experience of African Americans would be of interest to corporations, nonprofits, and the field. In addition, data from this study can be used to develop policy manuals that help guide nonprofit agencies and volunteer organizations in their approach to enhancing the overall formal volunteer experience for African Americans. Last, a longitudinal study exploring the impact informal volunteering has on African Americans participating in formal volunteer activities would be valuable to the field and future studies.

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## Appendix A: Online Survey Questionnaire

Online Interview Protocol

Personal Demographics

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. At what age did you start volunteering?
4. Please list the city(s) you have volunteered in?
5. Please list the organizations you have volunteered for within the past 5 years.

Volunteer Experience

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being exceptional, how beneficial has volunteering been in the following areas:
    A. Making connections that further your career goals
    B. Obtaining employment
    C. Receiving promotions
    D. Establishing work relationships
    E. Establishing non-work-related relationships
    F. Quality of Life
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being exceptional, how would you rate your relationship with the work colleagues you volunteer with?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being exceptional, how would you rate your relationship with members of the groups you volunteer with?

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being exceptional, how would you rate your relationships with members of your social networks?
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being exceptional, how would you rate your relationship with people outside of your inner circle?
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being exceptional, how would you rate your level of trust with members of the groups you belong to?
7. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being exceptional, how would you rate your level of trust with members of the groups you volunteer with?
8. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being less important and 5 being very important, how would you rate the importance of having the following as it relates to success in your field/goals:
    A. a network of acquaintances
    B. Relatives
    C. Friends

Motivations to Volunteer

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least and 5 being the greatest, how would you rate the following motivations to volunteer:
    A. Encouraged by employer
    B. Encouraged by coworkers
    C. Encouraged by friends
    D. Encouraged by family
    E. The mission of the organization

F. The ability to provide a donation by volunteering (grant matching volunteer hours)

E. The impact of the organization

G. Personal connection to the mission/recipients/clients of the organization

H. Encouraged by social network

Volunteer Experience Challenges

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being exceptional, how would you rate your ability to connect with others outside of volunteering with your job?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being exceptional, how would you rate your ability to participate in volunteer efforts outside of employer-sponsored volunteer projects?

## Appendix B: One-On-One Interview Questionnaire

Benefits and Social Relations

1. How does volunteering contribute to your goals (career and personal) and social life?
2. How does volunteering contribute to your ability to make new connections and build relationships?
3. Thinking about your relationships before you started volunteering with your job, how have your relationships changed?
    A. How has your relationship with colleagues changed?
    B. How has your relationship with members of other social groups changed?
    C. What has stayed the same?
4. Now, let me ask you about your relationships with the people and organizations outside your employment place.
    A. What other organizations and groups are you involved with?
    B. Do you volunteer with any of them?
    C. How did those relationships start?
    D. What benefits have you received from being connecting with the people and organizations?
    E. How often do you interact with these people, organizations, and groups?
5. What groups and organizations are you wanting to join? What benefits are you looking to gain from joining them?
6. Do you feel like you are treated with respect as a volunteer?
    A. Does that respect translate into other relationships?

7. In what ways have you been able to use your connections made through volunteering to join networks and/or groups you are a member?
8. In what ways do you want to use your connections made through volunteering to join networks and/or groups you are a member?
9. In what ways do you want to use your connections made through volunteering to join networks and/or groups you are not a member?
10. Are there people you have connected with while volunteering that you can call/message/contact to get ideas on how to achieve your goals or work through a situation?
    A. If so, from where do you know this person/these people? How did you meet?
11. In what ways, if any, has your feelings or attitudes towards people who don't look like you or are not in the same social groups as you changed since you started volunteering?
12. Thinking about your perception and quality of life before you started volunteering, how did your perception and quality of life change since you started volunteering? (i.e., health benefits, outlook towards life, level of isolation).

Challenges and Limitations

1. What are some challenges or limitations that you have faced in volunteering?
2. What are the challenges of volunteering with your job?
3. What are the challenges of volunteering when it is not with your job?

Motivation, Engagement & Impact

1. What motivated you to start volunteering?

A. What makes you keep volunteering?

B. What made you stop volunteering?

2. What types of volunteering have you participated in? (i.e., virtual volunteering, physical volunteering). Which do you prefer and why?

3. How were you recruited to volunteer? (i.e., mandatory for work/class, civic payback, court-ordered, by family/friend, encouraged by the company, encouraged by a colleague, etc.)

4. Is volunteering a requirement as part of your membership with any networks or groups for which you are a member?

5. Is volunteering required at your place of employment?

5. What was the most significant volunteer experience? What made it significant?

6. Please describe how you have encouraged other African American millennials to volunteer?

7. Based on your experiences, what are some ways organizations can improve the volunteer experience?

8. Based on your experiences, how can volunteer agencies recruit African American millennials to volunteer?

9. How has volunteering with your employer impacted the way you view them as a manager? How has it impacted the way you see the company you work for?

10. Have you returned to volunteer with a nonprofit organization outside of your employer? Why or why not?

Personal Demographics

1. Tell me about yourself?
    A. Personal background (e.g., hometown, familial experience, educational background, hobbies, gender, age, etc.)
2. How often do you participate in employer-sponsored volunteer activities?
3. Is participation in employer-sponsored volunteer activities mandatory or voluntary?
4. If you do not participate in employer-sponsored volunteer activities, please share why.
    A. Did you participate in the past? If so, why did you stop?
5. What types of activities/programs/organizations do you/have you volunteered with in the past?
6. What motivated you to start volunteering? What makes you keep volunteering? What made you stop volunteering?
7. How often do you volunteer?
    A. Do you volunteer weekly, on occasion, etc.?
8. When did you begin volunteering?
    A. Describe the volunteer event, including the organization or group you volunteered with, volunteer activity, and motivation to volunteer.
9. How would you describe your exposure to volunteering while growing up?
    A. Describe your parents' or guardians' level of involvement in volunteering when you were younger.
10. Why do you continue to volunteer?
11. Tell me about your expectations of what your experience should be like as a volunteer?

12. Have your reasons for volunteering with your employer-led volunteer team changed since you started? If so, how?

13. If you are in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, are you open to participating in a field interview where you observed in a volunteer capacity?

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your volunteer experiences?

## Appendix C: Focus Group Questionnaire

1. What are some things/areas/fields you would like to volunteer in?
2. Have you ever had a time when you wanted to volunteer but felt like your identity/role as a woman/man prohibited you from volunteering?
3. If time permitted, would you volunteer more? If so, where and for whom?
4. When you were not employed full time, did you volunteer? If so, how often?
5. When considering a volunteer activity, do you gravitate towards activities specific to gender-specific activities (i.e., women helping with traditional roles such as prepping and preparing food and men with building and maintenance)? If so, why? If not, why not?
6. What challenges, if any, have you faced while volunteering or attempting to volunteer?
7. When you participate in formal volunteering, what is your expectation as a volunteer?
8. What are some challenges and limitations that come along with volunteering with your employer?