A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF OLDER WOMEN'S COMMUNITY

PARTICIPATION OVER THE LIFE COURSE

THESIS

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by

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This thesis is dedicated to the women from generations past who have created beautiful communities for today's generation and those to follow. You have birthed us, nurtured us, taught us and liberated us. And your work continues…

"No one is born fully-formed: it is through self-experience in the world
that we become what we are."

— Paulo Freire

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I have been asked many times why I chose to study older women's community participation. I think the source of my interest ultimately comes from my mother. From an early age, she exposed me to serving others in the community. She aided migrant farmworkers, poor children in public housing, people with disabilities and countless others. As a mother, she encouraged my participation, and as a community member, she modeled the way society can thrive when citizens take an interest and participate. Thank you mama. I love you.

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The composition of the older adult population in the United States is undergoing

extensive changes. Estimates show a doubling of adults over 65 years and tripling of

adults over 85 years by mid-century (Bernstein and Edwards 2008). Experts suggest an aspect of successful aging is community participation; however, Putnam (2000) warns of a decrease in community participation by the general population. In order to gain a better understanding of older women's community participation, this study draws on a life course perspective, using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 30 women over the age of 60 in a central Texas community. The study explores the patterns of community participation among these older women over the life course and the motivation behind community participation for these older women by examining four broad areas of community participation: volunteering, organizational membership, place of worship attendance/membership and voting/local government participation. Data demonstrate two major themes: continued involvement and commitment to service. Continued involvement was present in (1) childhood; (2) early adulthood; and (3) later adulthood. Commitment to service uncovered several sub-themes, including (1) someone asked them; (2) with duty and purpose; (3) actively; (4) with enthusiasm and a positive outlook; (5) with a commitment to the common good; and (6) barriers and discontinuation.

Interviews reveal that the women tended to use a place of worship as a vehicle for community participation across the life course and that their participation tended to revolve around their children in early adulthood. In addition, cohort, age, and period effects impacted the women's participation. Furthermore, a disconnect existed between the participatory activities of the women and the community problems the women identified as important. Implications are discussed in this study

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

People are living longer and living more and more into old age. As a society, the

United States of America is getting older. United States Census data suggest our nation is

getting older (Bernstein and Edwards 2008). By the year 2050, the U.S. population aged

65 years and older is expected to reach 88.5 million, doubling current estimates, and the

number of adults over the age of 85 will reach 19 million, tripling current estimates

(Bernstein and Edwards 2008). Considering this boom in our older adult population,

research on aging in the United States enables us to enhance our knowledge of a

significant component of society.

One commonly investigated area in research on aging is community participation

(Hendricks and Cutler 2001; Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, and Tang 2003; Van

Willingen 2000). Experts in the field of aging promote community participation as a tool

for successful aging (Cohen, Galambos, Greene, and Kropf 2007: 29). A collaborative

report by Research Triangle International (2006) found that, in every state, women

volunteered more than men for a national average of 32 percent of women and 25 percent

of men serving as volunteers. The present study examines community participation over

the life course of older women. Through this study, I explore the dynamics of the following research questions: (1) What are the patterns of community participation among older women over the life course? and (2) What is the motivation behind community participation for these older women? The purpose of this study is to offer a deeper awareness of the intersection between older women and their lived experiences with community participation.

Considering the growing number of older adults and the benefits of community participation for that population, the present study puts forth some societal and individual implications. For example, if community participation is a component of the pathway to successful aging, then determining avenues to recruit and retain engaged older citizens is a public health issue.

In addition to this introductory chapter, this thesis is organized into four additional chapters. Chapter Two includes a literature review that provides an overview of current literature, relevant theories, and trends in community participation. Chapter Three explains the methodology used for this study including the sampling procedure, sample characteristics and the analysis technique. Chapter Four reveals the findings of the study, specifically community participation patterns in childhood, early adulthood, and later adulthood, as well as motivation for community participation over the life course. Chapter Five comprises a discussion of the summary, limitations and implications of the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In an effort to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's lived

experiences with community participation, a review of the relevant literature was

conducted. The review builds a solid foundation for discerning the various components of

this study. First, I discuss how current literature has examined older women and

community participation. Then I conclude with several applicable theories for this study.

OLDER WOMEN AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

There is a trend of researchers framing the specific study of older women using a

social problems framework (Gibson 1996; Payne and Whittington 1976). In other words,

social scientists most often want to know, *what's wrong with the older woman?*

However, other researchers (Gibson 1996; Laz 1998; Payne and Whittington 1976)

support the notion that the discipline should refrain from a sole reliance on a social

problems framework when studying older women. Laz (1998) believes a social problems

approach draws attention to the differences between subjects (e.g. young and old, men

and women), emphasizing the subject as a basic category and not something that is

constructed or relational.

Previous studies have also examined older women's personal relationships. Examples include the dynamics of losing a spouse (Utz, Carr, Neese, and Wortman 2002) and negotiating caregiving as a receiver or a provider (Lyons, Zarit, Sayer, and Whitlatch 2002; Seltzer and Li 2000). Health (Grenier and Hanley 2007; Williams and Umberson 2004) and economic well-being, particularly regarding retirement (Han and Moen 1999; Vartanian and McNamara 2002; Wilson 2003) have also been explored. A great deal of data has also been produced on successful aging (Cohen, Galambos, Greene, and Kropf 2007; Rowe and Kahn 1998). Successful aging, as suggested by Rowe and Kahn (1998), is measured by disease avoidance, high cognitive and physical function maintenance, and engagement with life. Crowther, Parker, Achenbaum, Larimore, and Koenig (2002) extended the 1998 Rowe and Kahn successful aging model with the inclusion of "maximum spirituality" (p. 30).

Community participation has been touted as one tool for successful aging (Cohen, Galambos, Greene, and Kropf 2007). Wilson (2000) explains that volunteers benefit mentally and physically from their efforts because volunteering "increases overall life satisfaction…and improves health" (p. 232). Wilson (2000) goes on to suggest that these relationships are likely reciprocal since "healthier people are more likely to volunteer" (p. 232).

Individuals volunteer in response to "social norms such as reciprocity, equity and social responsibility" (Kincade, Rabiner, Bernard, Woomert, Konrad, DeFriese, and Ory 1996: 474). Exploration of the reasons people typically volunteer has revealed a yearning to help others (Friedman 1988; McLaughlin 1984). In addition to this desire to lend a hand, studies have shown that the propensity for volunteering increases as a person's

level of education increases (Chee 2008; McPherson and Rotolo 1996; Sundeen and

Raskoff 1994). Furthermore, individuals are more likely to volunteer if their parents

volunteered (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1992; Mustillo, Wison, and Lynch 2004). Class

and gender have also been shown to impact a person's likelihood for volunteering:

"Regardless of whether their mothers volunteered, middle-class daughters are more likely

than working-class daughters to become more involved in volunteer work as they make

the transition to middle age" (Mustillo, Wison, and Lynch 2004: 539). Chee (2008) found

that interest in their communities was greater for female retirees than male retirees. Payne

and Whittington (1976) determined that women's belonging to religious entities is greater

than that of men (1976). Putnam (2000) further suggested that churches, in fact, breed

volunteers by providing the necessary tools to their congregations to grasp skills, such as

public speaking, meeting facilitation and mediation.

While volunteerism is not the sole aspect of community participation discussed in

this study, it is a term commonly associated with community participation. Wilson (2000)

offers this explanation of volunteering: "any activity in which time is given freely to

benefit another person, group or cause…part of a cluster of helping behaviors, entailing

more commitment than spontaneous assistance but narrower in scope than the care

provided to family and friends" (p. 215). Occasionally, civic engagement may be

interchangeable with the terms volunteering and community participation. However,

Barker (2002) suggests civic engagement boasts a broader scope than previously

mentioned and includes helping others in need and does not rely on prepared, formal

activities. Martinson (2006) further proposes, "political activism…has dramatic public

consequences and therefore ought to be embraced in the realm of civic engagement" (p.

63). So what exactly constitutes community participation? Referencing previous studies (Bailey 2007), I established community participation as a complex concept that encompasses the following 4 areas: (1) volunteerism, (2) organizational membership, (3) voting/local government involvement and (4) place of worship attendance and membership. I chose these areas to represent activities from a variety of outlets.

THEORIES

Several theories on aging provide a sociological perspective to the present and past circumstances experienced by older people. Social capital theory has been used as social resources that influence an individual's likelihood toward involvement in community participatory activities. Two gerontological theories in particular, activity theory and continuity theory, can explain the intersection between aging and community participation. Additionally, the life course perspective provides a unique lens through which to view the lived experiences of older adults. This study does not present an exhaustive incorporation of theories on older women's community participation, but rather a consideration of four well-known, widely accepted theories relevant to the research in this study.

Social capital theory

Social capital theory references the amalgamation of the social connections, resources and networks of an individual – either provided to the person or secured by the person (Bourdieu 1986; Lin 1999; Putnam 1995). An individual's social capital changes over time, therefore it is important to understand the ways in which social capital affects an older person's community participation or the ways in which an older person's

involvement is impacted by social capital. For example, a homemaker who gathers with her friends every Wednesday for brunch, attends church services weekly, volunteers at the library twice a week, and plays bridge once a month probably has a well-amassed arsenal of social capital. However, it is likely that a homemaker who is retired, rarely visits with friends, and family and typically does not leave her home does not have a stockpile of social capital. Social capital plays a role in the ways in which people interact in society. Chee (2008) found that retirees reported greater community interest if they knew a lot of people in their community and belonged to many community entities. Putnam (2000) demonstrated the relationship between church and social capital: "Religiously involved people seem simply to know more people" (p. 67). Regarding the exploration of older women's community participation, social capital may provide an explanation of how a person's network strengthens or weakens their level of community participation.

Activity theory

Robert Havighurst initially formulated activity theory (Atchley and Barusch 2004; Quadagno 2005). Activity theory suggests individuals who remain as active in their later years as they were in middle age will grow older successfully (Havighurst 1963; Rosow 1967). Individuals who were active in their younger years replace the various voids accompanying aging (e.g. retirement from work, loss of spouse) with surrogate endeavors (Cavan, Burgess, Havighurst, and Goldhammer 1949). These replacements enable the aging individuals to maintain their previous level of activity, which, in turn, prevents the individuals from becoming cut-off from the world around them. In fact, Stephan (1991) found "empirical results strongly support the idea that retired women volunteer as a

substitute for market work" (p. 225). Activity theory could be considered a response to disengagement theory which suggests that a natural and necessary reciprocal relationship of separation occurs between society and individuals as they age (Cumming and Henry 1961).

Activity theory may contribute to the overall understanding of older adults' community participation by explaining the role of societal pursuits and connections in their lives over the life course – not only in later adulthood. Specifically, activity theory is useful in explaining community participation in well-adjusted older adults who begin volunteering in their retirement. For example, a woman who used to be a schoolteacher and begins volunteering when she retires to teach English in an English as a second language class replaces her professional career as an educator with a volunteer activity. A woman who was a housewife may, upon becoming a widow in later adulthood, replace the decades of taking care of her family with volunteering in a soup kitchen.

Continuity theory

Utz, Carr, Neese and Wortman (2002) declared that "continuity theory prevails as the most applicable theory for the longitudinal study of social participation among older adults" (p. 531), among continuity, activity and disengagement theories. Continuity theory (Atchley 1989) suggests that people bring along the behaviors and attitudes from their early years to their later years. Individuals, Atchley (1989) argues, desire steadiness throughout various phases of their lives. In other words, if people were volunteering before retirement, they will most likely continue to volunteer after retirement. If women were members of a community organization in earlier years, they may continue to be

members in later adulthood. Quadagno (2005) goes on to explain that "by the time people reach middle age, they have built a life structure that is linked to their past and that becomes the base on which they build their future" (p. 31). Continuity theory possibly explains certain aspects of community participation of older adults. For example, it may bring clarity to predicting what level of involvement older adults will have based on their earlier years of community participation or non-participation. The Harvard School of Public Health – MetLife Foundation (2004) found that volunteering peaks at mid-life and then decreases. If these individuals were volunteering at mid-life, then why did they lessen or increase their community participation at retirement instead of maintaining a comparable level?

According to Payne and Whittington (1976) older women maintain an interest in the types of pursuits they held up to five years prior to their current age and "expect little change in preference in the next five years" (p. 495). Bearing this in mind, we see the utility of exploring the activities of older women before they entered later adulthood to speculate on their level of community participation as they age. Life course perspective is "an emerging paradigm" that offers an outline for understanding the ways in which individuals transition into future roles (Elder 1994: 4).

Life course perspective

The life course perspective frames individual experiences, together with the timing and order of those events, and analyzes them in the context of societal-historical events (Elder 1994). This perspective requires the researcher to examine data over the course of the life course (e.g. from birth to death). This framework sketches a lifelong

image of the patterns and single events that take place over the life course (Quadagno 2005). Elder (1994) notes "the link between human lives and their historical times" as a crucial aspect of understanding the life course perspective (p. 5). According to the life course perspective, peoples' experiences in older age with community participation may reflect age, period, and cohort effects. According to Quadagno (2005), age effect refers to experience due to a person's chronological age; period effects refer to the experience of people who live through a particular historical happening; and cohort effects refer to the encounters or traits belonging to individual based on the cohort with which they are identified. For example, women in their 40s and 50s in the 1970s "experienced their early adult years in the context of the Second World War" (Moen 1991: 136). Coming of age in this time period shapes their concept of patriotism and its interplay with community participation.

Consistent with life course, Wilson (2003) puts forward that social and historical contexts for a sample can add to the richness of a study. An exploration of the range of community participatory activities women perform throughout the life course, not only during their later years, is essential in order to gain insight on the types of activities the women will continue performing as they age. Understanding major societal events taking place at various times throughout the lives of people provides a foundation for comprehensive insight into understanding their actions.

The present study

Little is known about narratives of community participation over the life course. There are more quantitative studies than qualitative, life course perspectives that explain

the circumstances of community participation as related to aging and gender. The present study relies heavily on the narratives of lived experiences – as told by older women themselves – to produce the data. This approach yields unique insight into the lives of women as they relate to community participation, including the kinds of community participation in which they are involved, as well as the processes through which they get involved in their community work. Furthermore, through this study, more can be learned about what women did in their communities during their childhood and young adulthood. By incorporating previous studies on social capital, activity and continuity theories, as well as incorporating a life course perspective, the present study attempts to add to previously reported data and enhance our understanding of the patterns of community participation in later adulthood and the former years.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was not to generalize the findings but to deepen our comprehension of the lived experiences of women and their community participation activities throughout the life course. Using a qualitative approach, the study depicts a multi-faceted concept of community participation – including voting, volunteering, membership in organizations and involvement with places of worship. The illustration emerges from the face-to-face interviews conducted with study participants so we can hear – in their words – their experiences with community participation throughout their lives. By hearing the women tell their stories, we learn about the meaningful aspects of their lives (Parker 1995).

Furthermore, qualitative research allows the researcher to make the connection (not necessarily a causation or generalization) between a respondent's lived experiences and the broader social backdrop of everyday life. Parker (1995) notes that "by talking about past events with other people…our lives come to have the appearance of a meaningful order" and individuals "recreate events that they value" (p. 516). Considering this, the interview process enables a researcher to learn about meaningful experiences

from the lives of the respondents and to report them as an illustration of community participation over the life course for a particular group of individuals.

By conducting face-to-face interviews, I was able to collect narratives from 30 older women regarding their community participation experiences throughout their lives. These narratives allowed the respondents to share in their own words their recollections of their personal experiences with particular activities, as well as the motivators and barriers to those activities.

Sampling Procedure

I recruited participants from a Central Texas town with a population under 50,000 (U.S. Census 2000). I posted flyers around the community in locations that utilize volunteers, including the public library, a local hospital and hospice center, the tourist center and an animal shelter. In an effort to target non-white respondents, I also provided flyers to an African-American history museum, the Hispanic chamber of commerce and a predominately African-American congregation. I conducted the first interview with a key informant known to me prior to the study. The key informant, an 85-year old active community member, connected me to members of her local groups. From there, I incorporated "snowball techniques" (Esterberg 2002: 93) in order to reach my goal of 30 participants. Snowball, in brief, refers to a word-of-mouth referral. In other words, I asked each participant with whom I spoke whether or not they suggested someone else with whom I should speak.

Four criteria determined eligibility for each respondent: (1) resident of the town described earlier, (2) female, (3) 60 years of age or older, and (4) participation in at least

one local group. I verified the potential interviewee's eligibility during a pre-interview telephone conversation I conducted with each woman. Following a brief phone conversation with each potential participant to explain the study, I scheduled a face-to-face interview to be conducted in a location agreed upon by the respondent and myself. Each respondent I phoned, who met the eligibility requirements, agreed to participate in an interview. In fact, the majority of the respondents seemed very willing to participate. Remarks, such as "Oh, I'm glad to help anyone getting their master's" and "Oh, I don't mind at all, do you need more names of people to call?" represent the general eagerness of the women to "help" with my research.

Interviews were conducted between the summer and fall of 2009. The interview sites allowed a certain level of privacy and comfort, depending on the location. I conducted 25 interviews in the homes of respondents: Three at the public library, one at a respondent's church, and one at a respondent's volunteer site. Most, if not all, of the respondents interviewed in their homes greeted me at the door cheerfully and invited me inside like an old friend. They offered me coffee or tea and asked where I would be most comfortable to conduct the interview. Several women showed me around their homes; others pointed out meaningful family photographs. One woman even sent me home with a flat of tomatoes from her garden. Each interview took between one and two hours and was audio-recorded for subsequent transcription. At the beginning of each interview, I read aloud a written consent form and required the signature of the participant prior to beginning the interview. Additionally, I provided a copy of the consent form for each respondent. At the end of each interview, respondents asked if I needed additional names of people to contact. One woman went through her junior service league directory with

me. Several women provided lists that they prepared for me before I arrived for the interview with names and phone numbers of women they thought I should contact for the study. All of the women were curious about how I planned to use the information and how I would analyze the information. They wished me luck in my career and asked me about my family and where I was raised. They wanted to know whether or not I had children and where my husband worked. Some of the women were huggers; others asked me to keep in touch. They were overwhelmingly hospitable.

During the interviews, I followed a semi-structured interview guide for consistency. The sections of the interview guide include: an introduction to the study, basic demographic information, a community participation definition, questions regarding community participation experiences in various capacities and concluding questions related to the respondent's general observations on their community. The majority of the questions on the interview guide are open-ended providing a conduit for rich data. I used the interview guide from Bailey (2007) as a model for the interview guide for the present study. Although many questions were modified, it served as a useful model for the interview guide for this study. See Appendix A for the interview guide.

Sample Characteristics

I interviewed 30 women over the age of 60. Participants' ages ranged from 62 to 93. The mean age was 77 years. The women self-identified themselves racially: 27 were white; 1 was Hispanic; and 1 was black. Of the women, 12 were married, 12 were widowed, 5 were divorced (and not remarried), and 1 was never married. Thirteen women reported living alone. Twelve reported living with a spouse. One woman invited her brother to live with her recently, and three women currently have an adult child living

with them for a short-term arrangement, due to circumstances related to the children's health and job loss. One woman lives with her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren. However she does own a home and allows her grandson, a college student, to live in her house. In addition, 25 of the women own their homes, and 4 of the women rent. Of the renters, two live in apartment homes in a retirement community, and two rent homes in the historic district.

All but two of the women reported membership of a local church congregation and regular attendance: 10 were Catholics, 6 were Episcopalians, 4 were Methodists, 4 were Presbyterians, 3 were Baptists, and 1 was a Unitarian Universalist. Of the two women who reported no place of worship connection or membership, both regularly attended a church during their childhood. Most of the women were college-educated: 13 held a bachelor's degree, 5 held a master's degree, and 1 earned a PhD. Nine graduated from high school. One respondent completed a secretarial program following high school. Of the 30 respondents, only 1 did not complete high school. She stopped going to school after junior high. This respondent was also the oldest respondent, born in 1916 and 93 years of age at the time of the interview. The majority of the women were employed at some point in their lifetime; two are still employed full-time, and one works part-time. Twenty-three were retired from careers typically in education or healthcare. Four of the respondents reported they have primarily homemakers. Many of the women who did work stated that throughout their career they were in and out of paid work in a way that enabled them to care for their children while they were young.

Eight of the women reported an annual household income less than $30,000; seven reported between $30,000 and $60,000; Six reported between $60,000 and $90,000

and four reported greater than $90,000. Five respondents were unable to answer the question. Reasons for not being able to answer the question regarding annual household income revolved around the statement that someone else (a spouse, an adult child) handled the finances for the respondent, and the respondent was unable to make an estimate in order to answer the question. See Appendix B for sample characteristics.

Analytical Techniques

Esterberg (2002) explains face-to-face interviewing as a solid technique when the research purpose is to gain understanding of people's thoughts or feelings. Furthermore, Kasper (1994) suggests an understanding of the experiences of women is best gained from the "standpoint of the women themselves" (p. 263). In order to protect the identity of each respondent, I assigned each respondent with a pseudonym during the transcription process. After transcribing the completed interviews, I implemented open coding of the data (Esterberg 2002). Open coding includes reviewing the transcription a series of times and refraining from forcing themes or patterns. I allowed the data unfold organically. Weston and Wiseman (2001) believe coding is not a precursor to analysis but a phase of the analysis (p. 388). In coding, I became deeply familiar with the data and began to notice emergent themes and patterns from the narratives of the women regarding their experiences.

An underlying component of data analysis is the incorporation of relevant theory. In the present study, social capital, activity theory, continuity theory, and life course perspective provide insight for understanding themes, subthemes, and patterns that emerged from the collected data. In other words, these particular theories drive the analysis process for this study of older women's community participation. As themes or

patterns became apparent, relevant theories were referenced to determine whether or not

the current theories explained the findings of the current study. Ultimately, these theories

provide a nuanced explanation of the trajectories through which older women may reach

routes of community participation. As is often the case, a point for point match between

theory and action is unlikely. The theoretical framework to explain older women's

community participation lies somewhere in the midst of a blend of the theories.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

By implementing a qualitative approach to collect data regarding community participation among older women, themes emerged from the interviews and contribute insight to our exploration of the initial research questions about the patterns and the motivations behind community participation. Two broad themes emerged including patterns of community participation over the life course and modes of participation over the life course. Continued involvement was present in (1) childhood; (2) early adulthood; and (3) later adulthood, although different kinds of activities were performed at different stages in their lives. Commitment to service uncovered several sub-themes, including (1) someone asked them; (2) with duty and purpose; (3) actively; (4) with enthusiasm and a positive outlook; (5) with a commitment to the common good; and (6) barriers and discontinuation. Modes of participation reveal how the women did (or did not) participate.

CONTINUED INVOLVEMENT

In Childhood

Most of the women reported childhood activities that revolved around church life. One respondent declared, "Well, I had perfect attendance at Sunday School." With

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similar commitment to her church, Anne discussed how she transitioned from an attendee to a volunteer teacher at her church.

> *Well, I've been teaching a weekly religion class for probably 40 or 50 years. Because I started when I was 16. When I was 16, our pastor drove by my mom and dad's house and one day he said, 'Anne, you're going with us to teach religion class.' I said, 'But Father!' He said, 'Well, I can pick you up on the way there and drop you off on the way back.' I've been teaching religion class since...I (have taught) some of the children of the children that I had in the 60s.*

Wald and Calhoun-Brown (1987) found that when individuals believe their activities are spiritually-powered, they feel strongly compelled to carryout those activities. From an early age, Anne felt a strong commitment to her volunteer position as a religious education teacher and continues the work to this day. As suggested by continuity theory, Anne maintained her volunteer involvement that she held in her early adulthood (and childhood in Anne's case) into her older adulthood.

In addition to participating in services and volunteer activities connected to a place of worship, it was common for the women to be involved with community organizations, such as Girl Scouts of America and 4-H, during their childhood. Both organizations emphasize the importance of community service projects among their membership. The time period when the women were in their early childhood or teenage years was also the World War II era, "a time of strong national unity and patriotism" (Johnson, Foley, and Elder 2004: 60). Crystal described her involvement with the war effort as a young girl.

> *I...(went) from house to house and yard to yard...helping people decide what was scrap and what could help us and I was an aircraft observer. They built a little tower in back of one of the lumber yards and that's what we staffed. We kept our eyes open*

*and our ears and we would listen and every time we heard a plane,
not everyone had phones yet, we would report. I think the report
was a direct line. I think it went to New Orleans. We either spotted
by sight or we heard it and we had learned to recognize sounds if
we thought it was a single engine or a biplane. We gave (the
plane's) direction...It wasn't difficult but we took it seriously.*

Volunteering during World War II demonstrated an individual's patriotism (Johnson,

Foley and Elder 2004). Brenda recalled volunteering during the war as well.

*The thing I do remember is during World War II, I rolled bandages
and I did all those little things for the good of the country and
selling war bonds and stuff like that. In those days, everybody was
very patriotic and did whatever you could. I did not have any
family involved in the military and my brother was drafted a week
after the war was over. But I knew people who did and it was a
small town and you know, you do what everybody else does.*

Brenda's volunteer actions as a young girl during a period of war were likely influenced

by her feelings of patriotism, a sentiment commonly felt during in the years during and

following World War II. While the women reported involvement with scouts and war

efforts, childhood community participation primarily centered on places of worship.

Crystal and Brenda are examples of period effect within the life course perspective. Their

childhood coincided with World War II, the era in which they became familiar with

community participation.

In Early Adulthood

As the respondents moved into adulthood, they typically continued their church-

related activities. Brenda noted, "I taught Sunday School of course. Every mother of a

child has to do that. But I don't think I did any kind of volunteer work when they were

pretty young, other than church work." Brenda made a couple of assumptions on the role

of a mother with young children. The first assumption is that the mother *should* be a

member of and/or attend a place of worship. The second assumption the respondent made is that a mother *should* volunteer for the place of worship with which she is connected.

In addition to a religious context, the women reported that their volunteer efforts during the period of time when their children were young and/or still living at home generally revolved around their children's school or extra-curricular activities (e.g. sports, scouts, 4-H, PTA). Dorothy shared, "I was a library volunteer. I knew the children's principal at the school where there were going…I was helping the librarian. I remember I did learn how to repair some books." Most of the respondents reported having children, and therefore, several respondents shared similar experiences with volunteer activities when their children were young. Dorothy said:

> *Everywhere I went, I always took my children. If they were in school, I didn't have to take as many. I didn't get anyone to watch them. They were my children and I wanted to be the one with them. So, if I volunteered at the school, I brought the kids with me.*

Brenda and Dorothy reflect the age effect of life course perspective. Through motherhood, they share similar experiences related to the types of volunteering they performed. In this instance, their activities revolved around their children.

While school-related activities were common avenues of community participation for the women in their early adulthood, attendance at school board meetings was a less likely pursuit for the women. Anne shared her feelings on why she was not involved in school board activities.

> *I was always pleased with the way our kids were educated. We had five children. I just, like I said, was pleased with their education. I was close in contact with their teachers and their school personnel. I knew their teachers and I would go up and visit and go to open houses and go to their programs.*

This respondent was satisfied with the treatment her children received educationally and therefore did not participate in the meetings of the school board; however she did involve herself in the day-to-day activities of the education of her children. Due to her dissatisfaction with the local educational system, Rose took a more formal approach by regularly attending school board meetings that led to her being a school board member.

> *As a matter of fact, I ended up being on the school board because of (attending a meeting). The Hispanic community had concerns about what's going on in our schools. There's a controversy going on because the superintendent that we had then demanded that girls wear their skirts just below their knee, that boys not wear their hair but only up to half of their earlobe, they couldn't wear jeans and a t-shirt. Things like that. And I would go to the school library and I could never find any material or textbooks or anything teaching about Hispanics in Texas. A lot of Texas history but we were never mentioned. And my goodness! There are so many Mexicans who fought on this side against Mexico. And to this day, there's not much mentioned of that. So, I decided to run for the school board. But I stayed and there was a school boycott, and it was a little controversial for a while. But in the end, things seemed to get better. They hired one Hispanic counselor. They hired three or four Hispanic teachers. Prior to that, they weren't hired here So, I remained only three years. It was just too much. I had all these kids in school, and I was working, and then the meetings would last until one o'clock in the morning. And I just could not take it – physically. I got sick so I didn't run for a second term. They wanted me to, but I didn't do it. I'm glad I did it though. I served a three-year term and I'm glad we got some changes made there so that's what prompted me to get in there – to make a difference.*

Henkin and Zapf (2006) explain the reasoning behind community participation for some individuals revolves around "whether they believe that their participation matters and that they are connected to the community" (p. 72). As a Hispanic mother with school-age children, Rose felt a connection to the concerns of the Hispanic community regarding the ethnocentrism of the local educational system.

While most respondents attended a school board at least once during their lifetime, generally while their own children were students in the local district, the majority reported little ongoing involvement with this arena of local government participation. Respondents typically cited that they attended such meetings when there was a specific issue of interest to them on the agenda. Flo explained: "I was going to the city council pretty regular until I got this part of (my street) declared a historic district. Once that was accomplished, I haven't been to any since then. There wasn't any need once I got what I wanted." This was a shared experience for many of the respondents. While at first-glance this may seem to display a non-committal attitude toward local government, the respondents did in fact participate at various points. Their participation could, in fact, be considered as maintenance for the long-term instead of episodes to address the short-term. Furthermore, their level of participation could be contributed to gender. In the city where the present study occurred, two of the seven city council members are currently female which also demonstrates a lack of women in positions of leadership in a local governmental activity.

"By almost every measure, Americans' direct engagement in politics and government has fallen steadily and sharply over the last generation" (Putnam 1995:68). Sarah shared why she did not attend local government meetings. "Uh, no, but I am interested. I do keep current with them, with things. And I know what's going on or at least I think I do. I'm not actually active in it, like I don't belong to the League of Women Voters. You know, I should do that." In discussing an activity in which she was not involved, Sarah remembered something else, according to her, she "should" be doing. From where does this pressure emerge? Hinterlong and Williamson (2006) suggest the

importance society places on older individuals and their volunteer efforts pressures people as they age to live up to a certain volunteer standard (p. 14).

Several respondents stated that they did not attend city council meetings because they lived outside of the city limits. Sylvia explained: "No city council meetings because for the most part, we've lived out in the country. We can't vote on city things or anything." When I pressed her on whether or not she had attended any county commissioner meetings, which are comparable to city council meetings for citizens who reside outside of the city limits, she responded; "no." In this case, while Sylvia suggested her lack of city resident status impacted her decision to attend local government meetings, she in fact had not participated in similar meetings that focused on the lives of county residents. Ultimately, early adulthood community participation remained connected to a place of worship but also incorporated activities related to the respondents' children and education.

In Later Adulthood

As the women aged into later adulthood, they continued to participate but the types of activities changed, as explained by activity theory. While the women were still overwhelmingly connected to a place of worship, their volunteer roles changed from child-centered activities (e.g. Sunday school teacher) to outreach ministries (e.g. food delivery programs for homebound individuals, poverty assistance programs). Karen explained her involvement with a food delivery program:

> There are eight churches in [the community] that [deliver meals].
> I drive for three of them regularly and sub for one once in a while.
> So that means, I drive one or two times a week for three weeks
> every eight weeks.

In addition to this food delivery program, several of the women are members of a ministry through one of the churches that provides utility and rent assistance, clothes and other resources to low-income people and people experiencing homelessness. Sarah described volunteering with this ministry:

> *Oh, there are just a steady stream of people everyday. The main thing we do is pay people's utility bills, and we also help them with prescriptions sometimes. And we have a food pantry which is open every Tuesday and Thursday. And the policy is not to be judgmental. We have to be good stewards of this money without being judgmental and that's hard. That's what we do.*

For Sarah and Karen, like many of the women, addressing the lack of resources of community members on a local level is a need that must be met. They meet these needs (e.g. food, shelter, medicine) by volunteering for local efforts, such as the homebound meal delivery program and the church ministry for people in need of emergency financial assistance. However, Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005) suggest "volunteering in a soup kitchen will help hungry individuals in a town but will do nothing to address broader problems of homelessness and poverty" (2005: 238). While most of the individuals interviewed for this study participated in local community-based efforts, several reported that they donate financial resources to broader efforts, such as state, national and international advocacy organization. Eliza shared how she became involved in a larger context for cause about which she felt passionate.

> *Beginning in about 1980, my passion became world hunger and global development. And I began to look for organizations that were concerned with that. I pretty well dropped local things. I came to understand what a huge role the federal government and it's policies and it's decisions play in those problems. And I as I came to understand that...I knew that was where I wanted to put my energy.*

Eliza moved from local work to national and international work in her later years. This is one example how the types of participation transpired through the life course of each respondent. Typically, as children, the respondents were engaged in activities connected to their church or scouting or school. As they moved into adulthood and most of them became mothers, they continued their church work, and their school-related activities became projects that were connected to their children. And finally, in later years, the women found their personal passion and interest while typically continuing their church-related service work. Each of the women interviewed reported some level of community participation. Throughout the life course, a continuum emerged with periods of lessened or greater activity. Each woman engaged herself in her community through a myriad of activities. See Appendix C for examples of the community participation activities reported by the women.

A notable difference of the types of activities became apparent when considering the race of the study participants. Two of the three women of color who participated in the present study described being involved with community participatory activities that directly related to their race. For example, Rose, a Hispanic woman, explained that the majority of her work in the community deals with the preservation of Hispanic heritage in the community, as well as issues identified by the Hispanic population as important, such as managing an oral history project of Mexican-Americans in the community. Similarly, Aurora, a black respondent in the present study, described her community participation as typically revolving around the promotion of the African-American community with projects such as Juneteenth celebrations.

COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

Requests for Service

Several respondents reported that they were not exactly sure why they chose

certain groups to which to devote their time other than the fact that someone – usually a

friend – asked them. Maria explained: "They asked me to actually join them. And I think

it was because that because in age there's wisdom. Not that I'm so wise. But, uh, I would

never have thought of joining in to be very honest because I didn't know what they really

did." Brady, Schlozman and Verba (1999) propose that people initially volunteer because

someone they know who is a volunteer asks them. Someone from the cancer society

approached Barbara, a cancer survivor, about providing transportation for patients

traveling to and from chemotherapy appointments. She explained to me that there was a

need to be met and that someone asked her to help, so she obliged. In addition to

someone asking her, Barbara connected to the community in need (chemotherapy

patients) because she was a cancer survivor herself. According to social capital theory,

the social resources individuals accumulate impact their community involvement. In the

case of Maria, Barbara, and several of the study participants, their social networks

(friends, acquaintances) triggered their community participation.

Similar to Rose's connection as a Hispanic mother to the Hispanic community

fighting for educational representation, Barbara demonstrated the suggestion from

Henkin and Zapf (2006) that individuals who feel a connection to a situation

(community) feel motivated to come forward and offer assistance. Rozario (2006)

explains that these connections – an aspect of social capital – impact volunteering: if

someone in an individual's social network does not invite the individual to volunteer,

then the individual is not likely to volunteer. Hudson (2006) states that "social capital created through civic engagement" (p. 51) connects the private and public pursuits of individuals, thereby countering a retreat from society.

With duty and purpose

Throughout the interviews, the women used terms, such as "duty" and "responsibility" and "obligation." When asked why she participates, Ethel explained with a matter-of-fact response, *"Well, it's there to be done. For the community, my mother taught me a long time ago, before Nike ever took it for a logo, to just do it. So if I saw that it needed something I could do, then I would try."*

This response reflects the responsibility felt by the women. Eliza explained why she participates: "I've been very fortunate. It would be inexcusable if I didn't continue." Hinterlong and Williamson explain "the current generation of elders has shown that it comprises active citizens whose commitment to civic life – strengthened by events or circumstances of their young adult years – has served as a vital resource for communities" (2006: 10). This sense of responsibility may be explained through the cohort effect of life course perspective. Overall, the study participants experienced their childhood or young adult years in the patriotic context of World War II. This cohort also came of age in years immediately following the Great Depression, which may contribute to their shared sense of duty for helping others through community involvement.

Actively

More than one respondent mentioned the trouble with not staying active. Laura said: "I had a grandmother who used to say 'Idle hands are the devil's playground.' I guess at the end of the day, I wanna feel like I've been productive...I have a sister who

doesn't. Maybe my grandmother didn't talk to her enough." Laura learned at an early age a message about choosing between activity and leisure. Other respondents shared similar ideas about the need to keep busy. Gertie said, "I'm someone who has to have a lot of things to do. I don't sit at home very well. Some of that probably comes from years of working." Taking into account activity theory, Gertie worked for many years, and in retirement she replaced her paid work for unpaid, volunteer work. While many of the respondents maintained a high level of activity in their retirement years, previous studies have shown that paid work is not always replaced in retirement (Caro and Bass 1997; Chambre 1984).

With enthusiasm and a positive outlook

While discussing voting habits with the women, they responded with clear conviction that participation in the electoral process is a critical component of community engagement. Eliza said, "Oh my goodness! I'm a great believer in the effect that government policies have for good or bad on the communities they affect. And I feel that very keenly." According to Ekderdt (1986) older adults favor a life in which they make significant contributions to society. Eliza felt she could make a difference and took an optimistic, encouraging stance on voting, a position similar to the majority of respondents. Overall, the women echoed one another with remarks similar to that of Patricia: "If I don't vote, then I haven't got a word to say. So, you'll have to excuse me, it gives me bitching rights." "No Vote, No Gripe" could serve as an appropriate motto for the collective of respondents.

With a commitment to the common good

Not unlike voting, respondents felt that everyone should participate in their

community. Time after time, they commented on community participation being the way to make a better community – for every resident. Judith shared, "I'm interested in making wherever I live a better place. I've always been interested in that." Research shows that people in later life desire to help others through service (Omato, Snyder, and Martino 2000). The respondents in this study reflect this research in their desire to create a community that benefits every member. Gertie stated:

> *People who just have a high school diploma and that guy with the doctorate from the university are going to see things kind of differently. So sometimes, that helps you meet in the middle to help the majority of people because the majority of people are not at either end.*

Knowing that the respondents shared a commitment to the common good, I felt it imperative to explore what the respondents believed depicts the "common good." Therefore, I asked respondents to describe their idea of an ideal community. The respondents had a difficult time with this question. Many quickly responded, "that doesn't exist" or laughed as though it was the most outrageous question ever posed. I pressed them to "dream a little" and they eventually shared the characteristics they value for an ideal community. Several said it should be a place where "everybody gets along." Karen explained: "You don't have to like everyone that you work with but you can work with them anyway." Similar statements were common among the women. Judith and Anne included places to worship as a requirement for an ideal community and Anne further explained that an ideal is a "Christian community…no prejudices…treat everybody like you would be treated." Their concept of an ideal community merged well with their responses throughout the interview (e.g. the women are active in their place of worship so they would want that to be included in their ideal community; the women

have a "just do it" attitude so whether or not they like someone they are willing to work together for the common good). Rose explained:

> *To me, an ideal community is where people feel that they can go anywhere and feel comfortable...We used to have a restaurant way back that had a sign on the door 'No Mexicans or Dogs Allowed.' I remember my father would go to the restaurant and buy hamburgers for us and he had to go through the back door. So I think it's very important for people to drive into a town and feel welcome anywhere you want to go.*

The personal, lived experiences of Rose's childhood surfaced to influence her concept of an ideal community in today's society.

I also asked respondents to identify the important issues facing their community, and an unexpected pattern emerged. First, respondents overwhelming reported roads, traffic or transportation as the most important issue their community faced. Leslie sighed, "Oh traffic! Our streets (here) are just not equipped to handle the traffic!" Other respondents echoed Leslie's sentiment and also commented on the lack of public transportation. The second most frequently identified issue reported by the respondents was water. Sylvia, "Everyone gets their water out of the aquifer...and of course, God isn't helping us out right now with rain, you know, to recharge it." This respondent, like many others, expressed a concern about the water source of the community. I listened to several of the women voice concerns about the stress on the water supply, 10 respondents to be exact. This concern may have developed, in part, due to the drought the community experienced during the months in which I conducted the interviews.

After the respondents shared their ideas on the important issues their community faced, I followed-up by asking whether or not they were involved in any efforts to address those issues. Half of the respondents (15) reported no involvement with

addressing the issues they identified as important to their community. Three respondents

answered "not really" or "not much" but continued on with ways they in fact had helped.

May, similar to two other respondents, downplayed her contribution.

> *No, not really. I do my part. I got new windows. I put a new roof on the house, a metal roof. I've got rain barrels. We put all our garbage in the backyard, you know, compost. We have energy saving light bulbs. We've done just about all we can to be green, and uh, we're thinking about replacing our air conditioner and heater. We have a small house and that's why we bought it. So we could afford it and afford to keep it up.*

While May diminished the value of her individual contribution to addressing

environmental issues, 9 of the respondents reported they had been involved with efforts

to address the issues they recognized. The most common reported method of addressing

an issue was contacting an elected official to discuss the particular issue in question.

Three respondents did not answer the question.

Barriers and discontinuation

Most of the respondents reported that health-related reasons caused people to

discontinue their community participation activities. Mae shared her thoughts why people

stop:

> *Well, I know I have a friend that has pain. And that keeps her from going to the garden club. And it's been one thing after another. She can't get along as well and can't sit down very long. And she's embarrassed about everything. So, she doesn't, you know. She has to lean over and touch the floor before she can get out of the chair. So she doesn't come to church a lot because she's embarrassed that she has to do that. And I've known people that have been embarrassed to use their walkers. You know? They don't want people to know they can't walk without it. So, um, maybe they're depressed? People get depressed. We had one of our members commit suicide last year. And she had been, uh, we couldn't get her to get out. She'd been going to meetings and people tried to reach out to her and (she) just rejected everything. And she was*

> *such a (voice cracking), uh, a really nice person...So I think that*
> *older people get depressed too. But those are the only reasons I*
> *can think of for people to drop off or not volunteer.*

Several respondents commented that people would have to have a "good excuse" to stop participating. For example, Sarah remarked, "Well, I would like to think that they had a valid reason if they did stop," and Madge echoed with "I don't think you stop unless there's a good reason." Martinson (2006) implores us to "not assume that aging looks just one way, that all baby boomers are alike, or that older adults need some packaged program in order to find purpose and meaning in their lives" (p. 64). In other words, why do individuals need a "valid reason," as Sarah and Madge remarked, to cease participation? Why should people in later adulthood be expected to be active in their communities? According to Martinson (2006), the ways in which older adults spend their days reflect different pathways to a satisfied existence, and society should accept this notion. Madge went on to explain that the other reason someone might not be volunteering when they're older is because "they never participated." Continuity theorists would agree with this observation, noting that the activities in which individuals are involved in during older age are part of a participatory continuum from earlier points in their lives.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the community participation activities over the life course of 30 older women. By examining their recollections and accounts of community participation, I was able to explore the patterns of community participation among these older women over the life course and their motivation behind community participation. Data collected through the interviews reveal continued involvement throughout childhood and adulthood, as well as commitment to service throughout the life course. While the results are not generalizable, the data do present a deeper insight into the actual lived experiences of the respondents as they engaged in community participation activities throughout their lives. The interviews resulted in narratives that extend current literature on community participation, aging, and gender. Current literature indicates that older people do volunteer. But this study amplifies our knowledge in the area through the revelations by the respondents in their own words.

As found in previous studies, the women tended to use their place of worship as a vehicle for community participation (Payne and Whittington 1976; Putnam 2000) and they felt encouraged by their faith to give of their time. The study participants reported middle to upper income ranges as in Mustillo, Wison, and Lynch's study (2004). They

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were educated, reinforcing the study findings of McPherson and Rotolo (1996) and Sundeen and Raskoff (1994). While I did not ask the respondents to rate their health, most reported during the course of the interview that they were in good health and maintained an active daily schedule, producing an assumption that they were in fact aging successfully as defined by studies by Crowther, Parker, Achenbaum, Larimore, and Koenig (2002) and Rowe and Kahn (1998). The women were inclined to participate in activities where they felt a strong connection as suggested by Henkin and Zapf (2006). For example, the women who were mothers participated in activities related to their children (e.g. scouts). Community participation in local government activities (e.g. school board and city council meetings) was low. The women leaned toward attending such meetings at least once in their lifetime but typically for a one-time, targeted purpose as opposed to ongoing involvement. The women reported that throughout the life course they became involved in community activities because someone asked them, reflecting the concept of social capital. Martinson (2006) explains that society's idealistic notion of community participation tends to marginalize those who are inactive. This ideal may promote the idea generally shared among the women that an individual would only halt her community participation because of a "good" reason, such as poor health. In other words, the women feel that, overall, people should participate. On the whole, the findings of the study incorporate the theoretical perspectives of social capital, activity theory, continuity theory and a life course perspective with a few implications. Considering the dynamics of social capital and the study's finding that the women tended to get involved when someone they knew made a request of them, it is important to further explore social capital as it relates to aging with the understanding that it impacts community

participation and, in turn, impacts successful aging. Similarly, taking into account continuity and activity theories, careful examination of the types of activities the women tended to perform at various points in their lives presents a certain level of prediction for the future dynamics of community participation for these women.

Interestingly, the present study revealed the tendency of the women to not participate in activities to address the specific concerns they identified as important issues facing their community. This lack of connection between an individual's participation and perception of community problems appears to be a gap in the literature. Furthermore, Hensen and Zapf (2006) suggest "additional research is needed to deepen our understanding of [civic engagement of older people] and identify effective strategies [for promotion] (p. 76). The present study uses a qualitative approach to collect and analyze beliefs and patterns of older women, which fills the void to which Hensen and Zapf (2006) refer.

However, reliance on narratives can be considered a limitation. As a researcher utilizing face-to-face interviews to collect data, I expect that the participants recalled accurate information regarding their community participation. The women were not compensated for their participation and, for the most part, were referred to me by others who claimed similar levels of community participation. I therefore trust the data I collected are truthful and honest accounts of the participants' lived experiences with community participation. While this study offers a great deal of insight into the lives of older women and their experience with community participation, the study employs a relatively homogeneous representation of the community in which the study occurred.

The respondents fail to represent a cross-section of age, gender, race, class, education and religious affiliation (or non-affiliation).

Future research might explore the following: (1) the motivations of individuals who choose to regularly participate in city council and school board meetings; (2) the community participation activities of the children of the respondents from the present study; (3) the community participation activities of older men; (4) the community participation activities of older women; representing a more diverse population crossing lines of race, class and gender; (5) a prospective, longitudinal study beginning with interviewing a cohort of women in their young adulthood to reflect the new millennium in community participation; (6) the effects of marginalization throughout the life course for people who choose not to formally participate in community activities (e.g. volunteering, political process, church); (7) the impact on community participation as gender roles fluctuate; (8) the impact of the economic realities of the last decade on the proportion of citizens participating in their communities; (9) the impact community participation of increased access to education across lines of race and class; and (10) the link or disconnect between the types of community participation in which women tend to engage and the problems they see facing their community.

I plan to create an information sheet using data from this study to highlight the types of activities in which these women have engaged, as well as an estimate of the total number of hours these women have donated to the community through unpaid service. Upon completion of the information sheet, I plan to provide the study participants and the city council of the town in which the participants reside a copy of document. The

information sheet will serve as an educational tool for city officials, raising awareness of community participation in their local community.

Examining older women's community participation over the life course provides a depiction of the types of activities women tend to perform, as well as the motivators for their participation. According to Henkin and Zapf (2006) "intensive efforts are needed at the community level to create an inclusive process that will increase the commitment of. older adults to engage in civic activities" (p. 75). I believe that one such effort includes asking citizens for input on 1) the things they value in their community; 2) the things they would like to see changed; and 3) the tangible ways in which the will contribute to both. By encouraging community members to create a vision of their ideal community, they will discern their place in its development and sustainability. Communities may use these findings to increase participation from their citizens across the age spectrum in places of worship, local government boards, voting and organizations. Academia may use these findings to illustrate how the lives of older women intersect with community. These data I retrieved from respondents in their own words regarding their own lives serve as tangible illustrations to balance the often-esoteric realm of sociological theory.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

Thank you for meeting with me today. As I mentioned on the phone, I am completing a thesis for my graduate degree. I would like to spend about an hour discussing your community participation over the course of your life, including as a child, as a young woman, in later life and through today. Our discussion will remain confidential. Your individual responses will not be reported separately, but will be analyzed and reported with all other responses from other interviewees. If I use your story as an example, I will not use your real name. Before we begin, I am giving you a copy of a consent form that says you agree to do this interview. After you review and sign the consent form, we can begin the interview. I will leave a copy of this consent form with you for your records. The consent form also includes my contact information. *(At this point, interviewee/interviewer will sign two copies of the consent form, so that one may be left with the respondent and one may be filed with the investigator.)*

Before we get started, I have a couple of initial questions to get us moving:

A. In what year were you born?

B. Are you married, widowed, divorced or never married?

C. What is your race/ethnicity?

D. Do you live alone? If not, with whom do you reside?

E. Do you own or rent your home?

F. How long have you been a resident of this community? Where did you live before here?

G. What is your highest level of education completed?

H. Are you retired? If so, since when? What was your occupation? For how many years did you work?

I. On this card, I have written some annual household income categories. Can you tell me the letter that best represents your annual household income?

1. What does community participation mean to you? Please be as specific as possible.

2. I am interested in learning about your community participation over the course of your whole life. Have you been involved with any local groups or organizations (e.g. Lions Club, political parties, Scouts, PTA) since your retirement?

If yes, which ones?

For each one listed, ask:
- How long have you been involved with the group?
- How/why did you get involved?
- When did you get involved? How old were you then?
- Is it a membership organization? Are you a member?
- What does it take to become a member (e.g. fees, invitation)?
- How actively are you involved with this group? Typically, how many hours do you spend a week (or a month) with (or for) this group?
- How many people do you know in this group? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
- Is that group involved with the community? In what ways does this group participate in your community? Have you ever been involved in the group's community participation activities? If so, what did you do?
- Are you still involved with this group?
  - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
  - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, could you tell me why not?

Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

Were you involved with any local groups or organizations when you were working (or younger?) If yes, which ones?

For each one listed, ask:
- How long have you been involved with the group?
- How/why did you get involved?
- When did you get involved? How old were you then?
- Is it a membership organization? Are you a member?
- What does it take to become a member (e.g. fees, invitation)?

- How actively are you involved with this group? Typically, how many hours do you spend a week (or a month) with (or for) this group?
- How many people do you know in this group? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
- Is that group involved with the community? In what ways does this group participate in your community? Have you ever been involved in the group's community participation activities? If so, what did you do?
- Are you still involved with this group?
    - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
    - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, could you tell me why not?

Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

What about as a child? If so, which ones?

For each one listed, ask:
- How long have you been involved with the group?
- How/why did you get involved?
- When did you get involved? How old were you then?
- Is it a membership organization? Are you a member?
- What does it take to become a member (e.g. fees, invitation)?
- How actively are you involved with this group? Typically, how many hours do you spend a week (or a month) with (or for) this group?
- How many people do you know in this group? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
- Is that group involved with the community? In what ways does this group participate in your community? Have you ever been involved in the group's community participation activities? If so, what did you do?
- Are you still involved with this group?
    - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
    - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, could you tell me why not?

Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

3. Have you volunteered somewhere since your retirement?

If yes, ask:
- What did you do?
- Where did you volunteer?
- When did you do that? About how old were you then?

- How/why did you get involved?
- How many people did you know there? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
- How long did you volunteer there?
- Are you still a volunteer there?
  - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
  - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, may I ask why not?

Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

Have you volunteered somewhere when you were working (or younger?) If yes, which ones?

For each one listed, ask:
- How long have you been involved with the group?
- How/why did you get involved?
- When did you get involved? How old were you then?
- Is it a membership organization? Are you a member?
- What does it take to become a member (e.g. fees, invitation)?
- How actively are you involved with this group? Typically, how many hours do you spend a week (or a month) with (or for) this group?
- How many people do you know in this group? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
- Is that group involved with the community? In what ways does this group participate in your community? Have you ever been involved in the group's community participation activities? If so, what did you do?
- Are you still involved with this group?
  - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
  - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, may I ask why not?

Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

Have you volunteered somewhere as a child? If so, which ones?

For each one listed, ask:
- How long have you been involved with the group?
- How/why did you get involved?
- When did you get involved? How old were you then?
- Is it a membership organization? Are you a member?
- What does it take to become a member (e.g. fees, invitation)?

- How actively are you involved with this group? Typically, how many hours do you spend a week (or a month) with (or for) this group?
- How many people do you know in this group? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
- Is that group involved with the community? In what ways does this group participate in your community? Have you ever been involved in the group's community participation activities? If so, what did you do?
- Are you still involved with this group?
  - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
  - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, may I ask why not?
Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

4. Have you attended a place of worship (e.g. church, synagogue or temple) regularly since your retirement?

If yes, ask:
- Which one?
- How/why did you get involved?
- When did you get involved? How old were you then?
- Are you a member?
- What does it take to become a member (e.g. financial contribution)?
- How actively are you involved with this place of worship?
- How many people do you know in this place? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
- Is this place of worship involved with the community? In what ways does it participate in your community?
- Do you still attend this place of worship?
  - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
  - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, could you tell me why not?
Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

Did you attend a place of worship when you were working (or younger?) If yes, which ones?
For each one listed, ask:
- How long have you been involved with the group?
- How/why did you get involved?
- When did you get involved? How old were you then?

- Is it a membership organization? Are you a member?
- What does it take to become a member (e.g. fees, invitation)?
- How actively are you involved with this group? Typically, how many hours do you spend a week (or a month) with (or for) this group?
- How many people do you know in this group? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
- Is that group involved with the community? In what ways does this group participate in your community? Have you ever been involved in the group's community participation activities? If so, what did you do?
- Are you still involved with this group?
    - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
    - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, may I ask why not?

Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

What about as a child? If so, which ones?

For each one listed, ask:
- How long have you been involved with the group?
- How/why did you get involved?
- When did you get involved? How old were you then?
- Is it a membership organization? Are you a member?
- What does it take to become a member (e.g. fees, invitation)?
- How actively are you involved with this group? Typically, how many hours do you spend a week (or a month) with (or for) this group?
- How many people do you know in this group? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
- Is that group involved with the community? In what ways does this group participate in your community? Have you ever been involved in the group's community participation activities? If so, what did you do?
- Are you still involved with this group?
    - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
    - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, may I ask why not?

Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

Ok. I just want to let you know that we're about halfway through with the interview.

5. Have you attended any local government meetings, such as city council or school board since your retirement?

> **If yes, which ones?**
> > For each one listed, ask:
> > - What motivated you to attend?
> > - About how old were you then?
> > - How actively are you involved with this group?
> > - How many people did you know at these meetings? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
> > - Is that group involved with the community? In what ways does this group participate in your community?
> > - Are you still involved with this group?
> > > - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
> > > - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

> **If no, could you tell me why not?**
> > Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

> **Did you attend these when you were working (or younger?) If yes, which ones?**
> > For each one listed, ask:
> > - How long have you been involved with the group?
> > - How/why did you get involved?
> > - When did you get involved? How old were you then?
> > - Is it a membership organization? Are you a member?
> > - What does it take to become a member (e.g. fees, invitation)?
> > - How actively are you involved with this group? Typically, how many hours do you spend a week (or a month) with (or for) this group?
> > - How many people do you know in this group? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
> > - Is that group involved with the community? In what ways does this group participate in your community? Have you ever been involved in the group's community participation activities? If so, what did you do?
> > - Are you still involved with this group?
> > > - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
> > > - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

> **If no, may I ask why not?**
> > Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

What about as a child? If so, which ones?

For each one listed, ask:

- How long have you been involved with the group?
- How/why did you get involved?
- When did you get involved? How old were you then?
- Is it a membership organization? Are you a member?
- What does it take to become a member (e.g. fees, invitation)?
- How actively are you involved with this group? Typically, how many hours do you spend a week (or a month) with (or for) this group?
- How many people do you know in this group? (e.g. one, some, half, all)
- Is that group involved with the community? In what ways does this group participate in your community? Have you ever been involved in the group's community participation activities? If so, what did you do?
- Are you still involved with this group?
  - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
  - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, may I ask why not?

Did something prevent you from getting involved (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

6. Overall, what determined the types of groups with which you decided to get involved? In other words, how did you choose "your" groups?

7. Have you voted in local elections since your retirement?

If yes, ask?

- What motivated you to vote?
- Do you believe your vote made a difference?
- Do you still vote in local elections?
  - If yes, ask why respondent continues.
  - If no, ask why respondent has stopped.

If no, could you tell me why not?

Did something discourage you from voting (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

Did you vote in local elections when you were working (or younger?) If yes, which ones?

- What motivated you to vote then?
- About how old were you when you first voted?
- Do you believe your vote made a difference in your younger years?

- Did you still vote in local elections until your retirement?
  - If yes, ask why respondent continued.
  - If no, ask why respondent stopped.

If no, may I ask why not?
> Did something prevent you from voting (e.g. lack of interest, resources, opportunity)? Ask for specific reasons.

Concluding questions:

I have a few more questions and then we'll be finished.

8. For various reasons, people your age sometimes have to stop volunteering or participating. Why do you think some people continue to stay active in their community as they age while others stop participating?

9. What do you believe to be the important issues facing your community today? Have you been involved in community efforts to address those issues?

10. Overall, what influenced you the most to participate in your community?

11. In your opinion, describe what an ideal community is like.

12. Do you know of any other individuals with whom I should speak?

Those are all the questions I have for you today. Do you have any questions for me?
I will call you if I have any further questions.

Thank you for your time. I enjoyed meeting you.

APPENDIX B

Sample Characteristics

Name*	Age	Martial Status	Race	Live Alone	Highest Education Complete	Work	Income	Own or Rent
Anne	77	Married	White	With Spouse	High School	Never paid work	<$30k	Own
Aurora	77	Divorced	Black	With Child	Bachelor's	Retired	<$30k	Own
Barbara	84	Single	White	Alone	Master's	Retired	Don't Know	Own
Blanche	76	Married	White	With Spouse	Bachelor's	Never paid work ·	>$90k	Own
Brenda	82	Married	White	With Spouse	Bachelor's	Retired	Don't Know	Own
Crystal	83	Married	White	With Spouse	Bachelor's	Retired	Don't Know	Own
Debbie	81	Married	White	With Spouse	Bachelor's	Retired	Don't Know	Own
Dee	69	Widowed	White	Alone	Master's	Retired	$30k-$59k	Own
Eliza	78	Widowed	White	Alone	Bachelor's	Full-time	>$90k	Own
Ethel	94	Divorced	White	Alone	Jr. High	Retired	Don't Know	Rent
Flo	77	Divorced	White	Alone	High School	Retired	<$30k	Rent
Gertie	71	Married	White	With Spouse	PhD	Retired	>$90k	Own
Jan	85	Widowed	White	Alone	Trade School	Never paid work	$60k-$89k	Own
Judith	78	Widowed	White	Alone	Bachelor's	Retired	$60k-$89k	Own

Name*	Age	Martial Status	Race	Live Alone	Highest Education Complete	Work	Income	Own or Rent
Karen	65	Married	White	With spouse	Bachelor's	Retired	$30k-$59k	Own
Kate	73	Married	White	With Spouse	Bachelor's	Retired	>$90k	Own
Laura	77	Widowed	White	Alone	Master's	Retired	<$30k	Own
Leslie	71	Widowed	White	Alone	High School	Retired	<$30k	Own
Madge	77	Married	White	With Spouse	Master's	Retired	$60k-$89k	Own
Margie	77	Married	White	With Spouse	Bachelor's	Retired	$60k-$89k	Own
Maria	62	Divorced	Hispanic	With Child	High School	Full-time	$30k-$59k	Own
May	73	Married	White	With Spouse	Master's	Retired	<$30k	Own
Mona	80	Divorced	White	Alone	High School	Part-time	<$30k	Rent
Nancy	85	Widowed	White	Alone	Bachelor's	Retired	$30k-$59k	Rent
Patricia	80	Widowed	White	Alone	High School	Never paid work	<$30k	Own
Rose	78	Widowed	Hispanic	Alone	Bachelor's	Retired	$30k-$59k	Own
Sarah	79	Widowed	White	With Child	Bachelor's	Retired	$30k-$59k	Own
Sue	71	Widowed	White	With Sibling	High School	Retired	$30k-$59k	Own
Sylvia	66	Married	White	With Spouse	High School	Retired	$60k-$89k	Own
Vanessa	88	Widowed	White	With Child	High School	Retired	$60k-$89k	Own

*Pseudonyms were used.

APPENDIX C

Community Participation Activities

Art teacher	Hospice
Cancer Society	Hospital auxiliary
Center for victims of abuse	Hunger organization
Child advocacy center	Jaycees
Citizen policy academy	Juneteenth committee
Cemetery commission	League of Women Voters
City commission/committee	Legislative and lobbying
City council	Lions club
Charity consignment shop	Magna Carta Dames
Community band	Meals on Wheels
Community choir	MHMR center
Counseling center	Mission trip
County extension/agriculture office	Museum
Crimestoppers	NAACP
Daughters of the American Revolution	Neighborhood association
Daughters of the Republic of Texas	Parent-Teacher association
Diabetes support group	Professional organization for work
Education organization	Quilt guild
Elections	Religious education
Entertainment venue	Retirement association
Environmental/conservation group	School Board
Faith-based committees	Scouts
Food and clothing pantry	Tai Chi instructor
Garden club	Tax preparation
Historical association	Tourist information center

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