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The Black Church: Using Social Capital to Reach the Unchurched and Community

Teresa Johnson
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Teresa M. Johnson

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Review Committee
Dr. Timothy Bagwell, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Joshua Ozymy, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

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Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

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by

Teresa M. Johnson

MS, Palm Beach Atlantic University, 2007

BS, Northwood University, 2004

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Previous studies on the Black Church have focused on its history as an institutional hub, its ability to generate social capital, the decline in its membership, as well as the connection between attendance and associational life. However, it is unknown how the Black Church is using its social capital to re-engage inactive members and remain connected to the community. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how Black Churches in West Palm Beach, Florida are using their social capital to re-engage unchurched members, as well as engage their community. Robert Putnam's social capital theory was used to guide this study. Using a qualitative case study, face-face interviews were conducted with six African American church leaders engaged in their community. The findings revealed that the Black Church is effectively using its social capital through outreach activities to engage the community and unchurched; a broader plan to invite the unchurched to "come as you are" is needed; in order to attract youth and parents, church activities should be appealing and exciting to the population; in order to build relationships, the church must first meet people where they are; and the church is aware of community needs and is addressing them through outreach activities. The findings of this study may impact social change by offering future studies on the impact of the "come as you are" message and instituting flexibility in service times and days.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The social capital construct of religion and the Black church is directly related to political involvement dating back to the Civil Rights era when the Montgomery Bus Boycott galvanized many people to participate in the Civil Rights Movement. Social capital, as defined by Robert Putnam (2000), looks at specific elements such as trust within an organization necessary to galvanize action towards a common cause. Leung, Chin and Petrescu-Prahova (2016) argued that the formation of the strong tie that occurs among church members, nonmembers, and the community is attributable to the generation of *social capital* – defined as the significance of the social network relationships resulting from one's individual ties. The Black church's dimensional role and cultural influence fosters an incredible amount of social capital towards moral guidance, social justice, and trustworthiness to its congregation and the community it serves. The Black church has long played a pivotal role in the lives of African Americans dating back to slavery and fast forwarding to the Civil Rights era. The duality of the church's role is understood in the Black community and addresses both moral and social issues (Brice & Hardy, 2015). Considering this historical view of the Black church, the pre-eminence of social capital for African Americans has its roots deeply entrenched in the church (Watson & Watson, 2015). The Black church is a place where resources can be sought by both members and unchurched individuals given that the church's role is still to confront issues that plague African American communities by providing services as measures of interventions (Brice & Hardy, 2015).

There has been a plethora of changes in the last 25 years in religion affiliation. Specifically, there has been an overwhelming disaffiliation by individuals in religion identification (Hout & Fischer, 2014). These individuals can be referred to as religious *Nones*, religiously unaffiliated, or unchurched. Hout and Fischer (2014) also discussed the lack of religious transfer where they found that those born after 1970 had weaker attachments to organized religion as a result of their religious cohort passing away. Furthermore, Vargas (2012) indicated that political backlash, often associated with religion, has been a consideration to why individuals decide to become unaffiliated with a church or religion.

Like other religious organizations, the Black church has experienced a loss of membership and connectedness to the community. Several reasons given by millennials for their withdrawal from organized religion included the fact that churches are intolerant, too political, homophobic, and hypocritical (Kinnaman, 2011). The following quote provides some insight on African Americans' connections to religious affiliation when compared to other races:

> Although 56% of all Americans consider religion very important in their lives, this percentage approaches 80% among African Americans. Of all major racial and ethnic groups in the United States, African Americans are most likely to report a formal religious affiliation. Nearly 60% of Black adults are affiliated with historically Black Protestant churches (Wingood, et al., 2013, p. 2226).

However, the Pew Research Center (Masci, 2018) shared that the number of African Americans who are unaffiliated with religion has increased. Since the 2007 Religious

Landscape Study was completed, the number of religiously unaffiliated Black Americans had increased from 12% in 2007 to 18% in 2014 when the study was conducted again. When exploring the demographics of this population, the research showed that African Americans aged 18 to 29 years identified as unaffiliated at a much higher rate than older African Americans aged 65 and older.

The increase of African Americans that identify as religiously unaffiliated or fit into the *Nones* or unchurched category occurred at a rate equal to the growth of the general population (Banks, 2015). This declining trend in the Black church membership is problematic for its sustainability, ability to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of its congregation and community, increase the social capital of both members and the unchurched, and improve the quality of life in its role as a social services institution. However, there is a paucity of research that has examined the utility of the Black church's social capital in the community they serve, with a specific focus on how to reconnect with the unchurch or *Nones*.

I explored how the Black church used its social capital to reconnect with the unchurched, better understand how to meet their needs, and maintain and grow the church's membership. This study used a qualitative study design with a case study strategy of inquiry. The study's participants included African American adults who served in leadership positions within three churches located in West Palm Beach, Florida. This study may offer insight regarding the efficacy of the church's social capital among the unchurched and the wider community and the types of activities and strategies that can be implemented to address the decline in membership.

Background of the Problem

To better understand the foundation of social capital, a glimpse into the history of enslaved Africans and the conditions that shaped and facilitated the formulation of those relationships is necessary. Dempsey and Butler (2016) acknowledged that Africans were enslaved and transported away from their homeland. The oppressive working conditions left little time for worship services; however, the enslaved Africans managed to come together resulting in the building of relationships, social capital, and establishing a road map for the creation of the Black church (Brice & Hardy, 2015). The birth of the Black church and its traditions has its roots in the continent of Africa, surviving the slave trade and becoming a remnant in the United States of America (Brice & Hardy, 2015).

This remnant became the foundation and the impetus toward what the Black church would look like going forward. Upon emancipation, the Free Slave Society—a nondenominational society—was formed in Philadelphia in 1787 by a Methodist and Episcopal preacher and was considered to be the first social services institution created out of race, pride, and a desire to help fugitive slaves (Brice and Hardy, 2015). Watson and Watson (2015) explained that the role the Black church has played is indeed multidimensional because it addresses the spiritual needs of its congregants as well as human and social development. Furthermore, Watson and Watson (2015) noted that African American churches have led the way with respect to civil rights and social change movements in the African American community. For this reason, the Black church has been and still is considered the hub of the Black community playing critical and multifaceted roles. This same rhetoric was asserted by Dempsey, Butler and Gaither

(2016) who pointed out that the Black church has been considered a place where one can receive important resources that could improve their quality of life, a place where shelter is sought in relief of one's problems, worries, as well as a community center addressing the social and economic needs of the community. When referring to community, it means the location which the church is located and the residents that live there, which includes the unchurched.

The Black church was considered the hub or cornerstone of the Black community post slavery (Dempsey & Butler, 2016). As time went on, the Black Church's role became multi-purposed and its social capital became a construct that represented its role as a social services institution for its members and surrounding community (Brice & Hardy, 2015). Barnes (2013) defined the Black church in his examination of the philanthropic habits of the Black church. He noted that there are seven historically recognized denominations of Black churches: Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, United Methodist, and Presbyterian.

The relational bonding that occurs among and between church members is significant and intense, and therefore lends itself to be regarded as behavior contagion within the church. The constant and consistent engagement and interaction by the church membership has a profound impact on its social capital level. From a historical standpoint, the concept of social capital has been explored by several authors such as Bourdieu (1983), Coleman (1986a), Granovetter (1983), and Putnam (1993). James S. Coleman is labeled as one of the first sociologist to start conversations around social

capital where he espoused the characteristics of social capital as trustworthiness, information sharing, norms, and effective sanctions.

Recent studies that included social capital as a variable (e.g., Agger & Jensen, 2015; Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Kirori, 2015; LaLone, 2012) have found a positive impact on the integration of social capital mobilization contributions into the response and recovery process when responding to natural disasters. Social capital mobilization contributions can help significantly to accelerate the process all while increasing the capacity of government and community. For example, Kiori's (2015) study showed that social capital improved the quality of life for Kenyans by reducing poverty and hunger and positively impacting the provision of public services in both rural and urban communities, and attracting private enterprise to communities and oversight of common resources. Also, when social capital has been introduced in urban planning it has been shown to improve the quality of life when citizens are engaged in the planning process (Rastegar, Hatami, & Mirjafari, 2015).

Numerous researchers have described the characteristics of bridging social capital. For example, Agger and Jensen (2015) characterized bridging social capital as an enhancer of trust among actors and secondary relationships who possess critical resources and the ability to impact their environment. Additionally, the authors espoused that bridging social capital is fostered among peripheral networks who possess the needed resources to make a difference in one's surroundings. Also, Leonard and Bellamy (2010) pointed out that bridging social capital takes on a much larger network with less close complex relationships between groups or individuals, and that the benefit to the

relationship may be expected to be shown almost immediately when compared to bonding social capital. Claridge (2004) also described bridging social capital as networks that are dense where individuals feel a shared identity. The author also described bridging as inclusive, vertical, consisting of weak ties of people who are different.

These descriptions portray relationships between subcultures where one cannot assume there are shared norms. These relationships are regarded as heterogeneous and will likely consist of weak ties because the focus is on relationships that include different groups and their connecting one to another resulting in a stronger society. Agger and Jensen (2015) described linking social capital as connections to individuals in positions of power, such as political or financial, noting the importance of these networks and their ability to diffuse information and provide access to resources.

Although the Black church continues to be a social institution and the hub in many communities, it continues to lose members (Banks, 2015; Brice & Hardy, 2015). There has been a noticeable decline in Black church membership (Masci, 2018). Specifically, since the first Religious Landscape Study in 2007 where only 12% of Black Americans identified as being religiously unaffiliated, in 2014 this number had increased to18% with more younger than older African Americans displaying a higher propensity to be unaffiliated. This trend could be problematic for the Black church, unless it can use its social capital to reconnect with the community and the religiously unaffiliated and seek to understand how to meet their needs as it serves in its multi-purpose role.

The inactive membership or the unchurched consists of individuals who have not attended church within a predetermined period, as stipulated by each church, and are not

active in any auxiliaries or committees (Who Are the Unchurched, 2016*).* These same

conditions have greatly minimized the potential of the unchurched to build "thick crust"

within the membership and establish trusting relationships.

Problem Statement

There has been a decline in the Black churches' membership and a

disconnectedness to the communities they serve (Masci, 2018; Tucker, 2017). To this

end, there exists an opportunity for the Black church to leverage its social capital to re-

engage unchurched members and build social capital in the community. The Black

church has long held the title of powerhouse because of the multipurpose role it plays as

social reformer and social institution, providing a plethora of resources and services to

those in need and advocating for the underprivileged (Watson & Watson 2015).

Although the Black church still fulfills some their roles, their membership has been

dwindling for some time (Banks, 2015). The Black church continues to be a leading

organization that generates social capital and those resources inherent within the social

capital can be described as bonding, influential, and beneficial.

Social capital is effective in carrying out common agendas espoused by the

leadership and shared with the congregation. Social capital is effective at influencing

others, perhaps new individuals to join the congregation, to become involved in church

activities. Although there are strong connections within the church, it is unknown how

the Black church is using its social capital to re-engage inactive members and how its

social capital is used to remain connected to the community. I sought to fill this gap by

exploring the application of the Black church's use of social capital towards re-engaging

the unchurched and connecting with the communities they serve. The study included a sample of African American adults serving in leadership positions. Data collection included semi-structured interviews.

This study provided greater insight into understanding the church's outreach activities that spillover into the community and the significance of bonding and bridging social capital. Exploring this problem in West Palm Beach, Florida at three faith institutions may provide a framework to benefit the Black church. The outcomes may result in community re-engagement, increased church membership by reconnecting with the unchurched and increasing the diffusion of resource information to those in need. Additionally, exploring the problem may result in better utilization of the connections within strong ties and between the inactive members or weak ties for the common good.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how Black churches in West Palm Beach, Florida used their social capital to re-engage the unchurched members as well as engage their community. Using semi-structured interviews data were collected from African American adults (both men and women) at each congregation who served in a leadership position. The multifunctional benefits that may emerge from this research not only have the potential to create strategies for expanding the church's social capital beyond its walls, but also to reconnect with the communities they serve as well as unchurched individuals in hopes of their return to the congregation.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How are Black churches using social capital to engage the unchurched members?

Research Question 2: How do Black churches foster bridging and bonding using social capital in their community?

Exploration of the above research questions provided a greater understanding with regards to how the Black church can re-engage the unchurched and reconnect with the communities they serve. Study findings will shed light on how churches are using their social capital in the community.

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Theoretical Framework

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The theoretical framework used to guide this research study was Robert Putnam's (1993) social capital theory. The key dimensions of social capital that define the theory are networks, norms and social trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit of an organization (Tanukis, 2013). I explored the networks, within the church to understand how their social activities transfers into the community, and if those networks were used to build trust with the unchurched, visitors, new members, and community, and the inherent resources they bring by way of bonding and bridging relationships. Furthermore, I explored how much these networks are relied upon to help elevate others in the congregation through resource sharing and opportunities for employment.

Putnam (2013) argued that trust was the main ingredient that produces interpersonal bonding. This stance was also supported by Coleman's formulation of social capital that highlighted trust as a norm-producing element within networks.

Putnam's theory (1993) provides a pathway to understand the utilization of social capital in the Black church since it encompasses those dimensions found in a social organization – such as networks, norms, trust, and all working towards a mutual beneficial goal. These same features can be found in the Black church and therefore is advanced in this research as the theoretical framework. These elements are also often present within families, between close friends, and within social organizations. It is the presence of these characteristics that work together in the resolution of problems. Networks that share these qualities are seemingly more apt to be called upon to organize and mobilize communities to address and solve a common problem, or to work toward an end goal.

The degree of trust denotes that a high comfort level, influence and reciprocity are at play within the groups. Parallel to the trust characterization is Putnam's (1993) description of social capital that focuses on the necessary elements of a social organization, such as trustworthiness and cooperation within the network working towards a common and mutual goal. Putnam's (1993) social capital focuses on its benefit to the broader community and neighborhood. With that in mind, the application of this theory tested how the Black church used the elements found in social capital theory to re-engage the community. The networks within the Black church have been described as demonstrating bonding social capital by allowing the church to organize and take action on concerns of African Americans, such as civic engagement and social reform. Understanding this, Robert Putnam's (1993) social capital theory was the underpinning framework for this research study. Putnam's theory was also used in this study to identify ways in which bridging relationships towards mutual benefit with the unchurched or

weak ties, by way of the church's social capital, can influence their return to the congregation.

Nature of the Study

This research study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Qualitative research is appropriate when one desires to understand a concept where little to no research exists (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, the qualitative approach permitted me to capture a diverse perspective from study participants. Hence, qualitative methodology provided a more appropriate method to explore the social capital of Black churches. This qualitative case study was used to explore the Black church's role to foster bridging and bonding social capital in their community and the roles they play in re-engaging the unchurched. The case study design supported the exploration and understanding of social capital in the greater community.

The origins of case study design are rooted in its ability to explore individuals, activities, programs, or events. Rudestam and Newton (2007) explained that this approach is associated with studies where there is intense effort to understand a complex unit of study. Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2014) advanced that the qualitative approach takes into consideration a researcher's interpretation of the subject matter being explored as well as the investigators interpretation. Furthermore, Yin (2018) explained that case study provides a method to understand complicated social phenomena by allowing me to focus in-depth. Researchers using this approach are charged with collecting data using a variety of sources over a specific period. As such, this methodology is congruent with the purpose of this research study.

The research sites were three Black churches located in West Palm Beach, Florida. These faith institutions were identified because their memberships were very diverse in terms of ages in the congregation, professions, sororities, fraternities, varied civic groups represented; all the churches have existed for 90 years or longer; and all host events throughout the year for the community at large. The participants were adult African American men and women who held leadership positions within the church and who were actively involved in the planning and implementation of outreach activities. Creswell (2013) suggested that the sample size should be substantial enough wherein themes and patterns can emerge. Consistent with the Creswell's (2013) recommendation, a sample size of six participants within all three churches located in the Historic Northwest neighborhood in West Palm Beach, Florida were used in this study.

Study participants were key informants and selected based on the inclusion criteria for participation. The inclusion criteria required study participants hold a leadership position in one of the three churches, be active in community events hosted by their respective church, and be 18 years or older. I used a purposive sampling approach. Patton (2002) explained that purposeful sampling is intentionally selecting certain data sources judged to be rich cases that will helped to highlight the research study's questions. According to Creswell (2009) this sampling approach is used to assist the researcher to understand the research problem and advantageous when a limited number of participants can serve as data sources.

Qualitative design encourages a plethora of data collection methods such as observations, document review, and interviews. Although each collection method has its

advantages and limitations, interviews, journaling, and memos were used for this study. The primary data collection method was face-to-face one-on-one interviews with participants. Interviews facilitated the collection of detailed information about the research questions. The data collection occurred in the natural setting of the churches where an interview protocol was used as the data collection tool. The interviews facilitated a greater understanding of the church's role in building social capital in the community. As part of the data collection method, I also studied the churches by gathering detailed information through journaling and field notes.

Instrumentation

Given that this study utilized a qualitative approach, the data collection method was semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2007). Semi-structured interviews is one of four categories used for data collection approaches for qualitative design. For this study, I created a semi-structured interview guide developed based on the constructs of theory and information from literature with open-ended questions, and an interview protocol to collect data from the study participants (See Appendix A). Examples of the interview questions included the following: (a) Describe the social activities in your church that have a spillover impact into the community, (b) What are some outreach activities that the church could facilitate that would appeal to the unchurched?, (c) How does the church invite the community to participate in church activities?, and (d) How can the unchurched play a role in building relationships in the community?

Methodology. For the purposes of this study, the target population was African American men and women, 18 years of age and older, who held a leadership position

within the church, and were an active participant in facilitating community events. A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants for this study. A sample size of six participants was used representing all three faith institutions. All interviews were conducted with participants occurring in the natural setting of the churches. Each interview lasted between 20 to 50 minutes and was audio-recorded with the permission of each study participant. I also documented the experience through field notes and journaling.

Each of the audio-recorded interviews was transcribed verbatim for data analysis. After the interviews were transcribed, a quality check was performed by listening to the interviews and reviewing the transcripts. Once the data were quality assured by the research, they were coded. Coding of the interview transcripts involved identifying and labeling text to create themes to answer the research questions. Coding allowed me to make sense of the data collected and document participants' perspectives and their general experiences. The themes and patterns that revealed themselves consistently were identified as major topics. The analysis was done manually without the use of qualitative software.

Operational Definitions

Black Church: consists of Baptist, Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal, Church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal Zion and United Methodist (Barnes, 2013)

Bonding Social Capital: "exists between individuals from homogenous racial, class, or religious groups." (Liu, 2009, p. 579)

Bridging Social Capital: "Networks that "bridge" diverse social groups and allow them to find common ground and common cause." (Liu, 2009, p.579)

Nones: people who are religiously unaffiliated (Thomas-Deveaux, 2013).

Politicized Black Church: consistently mobilized Blacks, especially whereby parishioners hear political announcements and religious messages about political issues. (Calhoun-Brown, 2003, p.)

Religiously unaffiliated: People who do not go to church or belong to a church (Masci, 2018).

Social Capital: The "features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." (Stockwell, 1999, p. 4)

Unchurched: People who do not go to church or belong to a church. (Masci, 2018)

Weak Tie: acquaintances less likely to be socially involved with one another than our close friends. (Granovetter, 1983, p. 201)

Assumptions

As a congregation member of one of the churches that will serve as a research site, access to the membership was accommodated and facilitated by way of the Senior Pastor's designee from each church. I was active in the church having chaired the church anniversary committee and served as the Sunday School Superintendent. Additionally, I am well known to the church membership, which lent itself to gaining access much more easily than if I was an outsider. I assumed that the pastor of the church would assist by

engaging the membership to be available to participate in the study. Additionally, long-standing relationships also existed with each church site. Having said that, once I received the blessing of the church pastor from the pulpit, it eased any concerns or apprehension that members may have had with engaging in this research study.

Limitations

When undergoing a qualitative research study there are many limitations inherent with the data collection types. With regards to conducting interviews, Creswell (2009) indicated that not everyone will have the same articulate ability and that interviewees may craft their responses to what they feel the interviewer desires. I interviewed six data sources using purposive sampling in the natural setting of the church. This was a limitation given the sample size was small and will not produce a larger data source size for the results to be generalized to the broader Black church.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to the Black church and its leadership because of their natural encounters with the unchurched and members to shed light on why people stop attending church and become religiously unaffiliated. Church leaders in their capacity often council families and individuals and have first-hand knowledge of reasons for the decline in church membership. Likewise, they are also privy to information that puts forth ideas as to how the church should re-engage the unchurched and reconnect with the community. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how Black churches can use their social capital to re-engage with the unchurched and connect in a meaningful way with the communities they serve.

This study was carried out based on the ethical procedures as described in the American Psychological Association Sixth Edition (2010). All participants' rights were protected and they were required to sign an informed consent that was thoroughly explained including the aspect of their voluntary participation. These informants were purposefully selected and characterized as someone holding a leadership position. To that end, the study sample size was six.

Significance of Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how the Black church can use its social capital to re-engage the unchurched and reconnect with the communities they serve. The sparse research on the decline of the membership of Black churches provided some insight into why many African Americans are becoming religiously unaffiliated. Authors such as Calhoun-Brown (2003) have explored the connection of social capital and its impact on church attendance and social reform issues that advances a historical perspective which highlighted the rise of the church becoming the focal point of African Americans. The activation of the Black church's social capital has realistic implications to the leaders of those institutions and to the overall church. Research on the Black church's social capital is very limited; therefore, this study may provide strategies to engage a population that has become religiously unaffiliated resulting in the reversal of the trend of declining membership and disconnected communities.

Although there is a plethora of research on the Black church's ability to generate social capital, scant research exists on the activation of the Black church's social capital

in the greater community to re-engage the unchurched and establish trusting

relationships. The findings of this study may advance knowledge on strategies for church

leaders and other individuals on how to leverage their social capital outside the walls of

the church, with the goal of bridging their social capital in the greater community towards

mutual benefit and greater quality of life. Such could indicate a real shift in power,

influence and advocacy towards policy creation and implementation of policies that

impacts the African American communities. The mobilization of social capital on local,

state and federal levels may have profound impact on social change by illustrating the

absolute value of community-based assets in the form of human capital and their ability

to legitimately assist their leaders in solving common issues.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study could help the Black church

in developing strategies and tools needed to re-engage unchurched community members

and better understand and meet the needs of the community and the populations they seek

to serve. Such a shift could be the help needed for those Black churches that are

struggling to retain members, increase their membership and remain viable in

communities. Last, the development of strategies could be what is needed to marshal

adequate resources into underserved communities, thereby advancing the economic base

that will have a domino effect on employment rates, increased high school graduation

rates, and improved health disparities, whereby some systems and cultural norms have far

too long negatively impacted African Americans.

Summary

In this chapter, I shared a historical perspective of the Black church. Specifically, an illustration of the formation of social capital among African Americans, due to barriers that precluded their participation in mainstream America. I explained how the Black church historically became the cultural womb of the Black community and today it is still considered the hub. Research has shown that the church has played a pivotal role in meeting the spiritual, social, and political needs of African Americans. Additionally, the literature also highlighted that regular attendance by parishioners has lent itself to creating deeper relationships (i.e., bonding social capital), which has enabled church leaders to mobilize members for the greater good.

The problem I sought to explore was how the Black church can use its social capital to re-engage the unchurched and reconnect with its surroundings helping to sustain its current membership, reverse membership decline, and meet the needs of the community. In this study, I used a qualitative case study approach, conducted interviews and took field notes to collect data in the natural setting of the Black church. The sample selection included leaders in the church who were African Americans, aged 18 years and older, and who had been involved in the planning of community events. The social change this study advanced included an understanding of how the Black church uses its social capital to re-engage the community and reconnect with unchurched members in hopes of their return to active membership. The research clearly illustrates that Black church's social capital is active and extremely beneficial as a resource and diffuser of critical information that improves one's quality of life.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides information on recent studies to offer relevant information regarding the variables contained in this study. These variables include social capital and its application in other studies, the Black church and its history as a social reformer and institution in the community, church attendance, the decline in membership, and the rise of religiously unaffiliated persons also known as *Nones*.

In the literature review, I highlight the significance of the Black church and the role it has played from a historical perspective to present day in forming social capital. Additionally, the review also show-cases the decline of membership in the Black church and its disconnectedness that has occurred overtime and the reasons for same. Finally, I also explicate research involving the activation of social capital across many sectors to show its positive impact in establishing trusting relationships, improving the quality of life, and ensuring social justice.

Literature Search Strategy

For this research study, many databases were accessed within Walden University's Library of databases and journals. Databases included: Academic Search Complete, Political Science Complete, Legal Trac, Soc Index, Business Source Complete, Pro Quest Dissertations and Theses, EBSCO and Thoreau Multi Database Search. Peer reviewed articles and various publications include the: Journal of Black Studies, Journal of Politics, Political Research Quarterly, Social Science Quarterly, Social Science & Medicine, Mental Health, Religion & Culture, Religious Research

Association, Inc., European Journal of Political Research, and Social Work &

Christianity. Among the major search terms used when navigating the databases were

Black Church, social capital, bridging social capital, bonding social capital, Black

pastors, civil rights mobilization, civic engagement, religion, politicized Black Church,

social networks, church attendance and *weak ties*.

Because of the databases and search terms used, many articles were identified that

provided useful content. These articles also provided additional resources which in turn

resulted in the discovery of supplemental information and articles about scholars relevant

to this study such as Putnam, Granovetter, Liu, and Mangum. Additionally, the research

strategy was characteristic of a qualitative approach regarding the site of data collection.

Because this research study concerns the Black church, the data collection techniques

occurred at the various churches on Sunday or Tuesday or Wednesdays. The churches

typically conduct bible study on Tuesday or Wednesday nights; therefore, this study was

conducted through the interaction with the participants in their natural setting. This

approach provided convenience for study participants as well as to create a more

comfortable experience in a relaxing environment.

Review of Literature

I undertook this qualitative case study for the purpose of exploring how the Black

church used its social capital to re-engage the unchurched and reconnect with the

communities they serve. Scholars have shared evidence that validates the Black church's

ability to generate social capital and mobilize myriad resources towards social justice and

to meet the social and spiritual needs of the community (Audette & Weaver, 2016; Brice

& Hardy, 2015; Guo, Webb, Abzug, & Peck, 2016; Hastings, 2016; Lockerbie, 2013; McClendon & Riedl, 2015; Merino, 2013). The literature review was focused on the application of social capital as a major variable as shown in studies to reduce poverty and hunger, improve government goods and services, the mobilization process of social capital's contribution, and disaster response and recovery. I used the literature review to better understand and contextualize the rich history of the Black church and its role as a a galvanizing institution and social reformer (see Watson & Watson, 2015). With this review, I show why the Black church was identified to play a significant role in this study. The attendance of Black church members was also examined in the literature review and shown to be a predictor to one's level of faith practice (Sobolewska, Fisher, Heath, & Sanders, 2015). Last, the review highlights the decline of membership and reasons for this decline in the Black church specifically.

The Black Church

The Black church historically is a neighborhood institution and a stimulant to political participation (Patillo-McCoy, 1998; Sobolewska et al., 2015; Taylor, Thornton, & Chatters, 1987). The impact of the church on political and community engagement in the United States dates back to before the U.S. Civil War (Swift, 1989). The impact of the church has also played a role in developing political engagement dating back to the southern frontier after the Civil War and the Great Migrations (Arnesen, 1997; Ayers, 1992; Barr, 1997; Foner & Branham, 1998; McKether, 2011), as well as the student sit-in movement (Morris, 1981), direct action such as the Montgomery bus boycott (Wilson, 2005), and current social movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM; Briggs, 2017).

Barnes (2013) defined the Black church as seven historically Black denominations. As I sought to provide a context of who the Black church is linked all seven denominations—Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, United Methodist and Presbyterian—to the Black church as hubs and social institutions that fight for the marginalized.

Church History. Brice and Hardy (2015) provided historical insights about the Negro Church being regarded as a social institution that started in Africa and survived slavery and evolved to be the nucleus of social activities for the Negro. The closeness that emerged between the enslaved Africans can be argued to have resulted in the constant engagement and dependency on one another for survival. This group bonding and identity development are important for the church as an institution (Putnam, 2000). In some context, as Riley (2016) noted, this close bonding and effective group ties has helped to define the borders of the church's inclusiveness or acceptance of outsiders. For example, this has been the case with response to social issues, such as HIV/AIDS (Fulton, 2011).

The Black church is not without controversary, especially for its perspective on gay, bisexual, transgender and lesbianism. Pingel (2018) authored a study that involved the Black church and community-based organizations involvement with HIV Prevention in African American communities in Detroit that focused on how public health practitioners and the Black church could work together to advance HIV prevention measures. The study affirmed the Black church as a source of social capital that could be

depended on to reduce disparities in their community and improve health outcomes

(Pingel, 2018).   With this in mind, the church's participation in HIV prevention was

regarded as essential because of their social support networks and social capital.

Responses from participants during discussions were overwhelmingly negative

concerning the impact of the stigma from those in the pews as well as the pulpit (Pingel,

2018).   This type of church hurt is reported to be a potential deterrent for those who are

gay or bisexual from having a relationship with a church.

Watson and Watson (2015) presented a study focused on the history of the Black

church using a single case study at Brown Missionary Baptist Church in Mississippi. A

total of 12 adult African Americans between the ages of 30 and 75 participated in the

study and its reaction to several concerns in the African American community. The

literature (Watson and Watson, 2015) provides a glimpse into the history of Mississippi

and points to the 2010 U. S. Census that showed Mississippi not only being the blackest

state, but in fact the poorest. Watson and Watson (2015) provided a historical view of the

church noting its role as a social reformer and its birthplace being the south. The authors

explained that in more recent times, the role of the Black church has been related to

social reform, social development, providing programs (such as health), and civic

activities, as they serve in the position of institutional hubs with the goal of advancing the

reality of a dual or multipurpose responsibility. As such, the Black church continues to be

regarded as an institution that serves their communities while addressing the social ills

that impact African Americans.

Politicized Church. The Black church has been characterized as a storied institution (McClerking, 2005). The focus of this study is not on politized churches but on the multi-purpose role of the Black church, which involves civic and political engagement. Tate (1993) asserts that political churches are better able to mobilize African Americans when compared to other civic organizations or churches. McClerking and McDaniel (2005) writes that the most important impact the Black church has effectuated is its impact on the political behavior of its members. Brown and Wolford (1994) espoused the culture of the church can have a direct correlation to motivate members to become civically engaged whose socioeconomic status is regarded as low. Harris (1999) declared the Black church's effectiveness is due to its ability to foster civic engagement and the provision of information and resources, which compels action.

The literature advanced a position that the Black church is central to the African American society and has undoubtedly impacted political behavior so much so that some churches are referred to as politicized or political churches. Why? Because some Blacks credit the church with learning about politics (Walden, 1985) and it is in this environment that political strategizing occurs and is crystallized. While not all Black churches are considered political, "extant research indicates that a certain subset of Black churches matters more than other churches for various forms of Black political behavior" (McDaniel, 2005, p. 722). Some Black churches stand out from others when it comes to political engagement since some take on a more direct involvement in political engagement advocating for its members to vote, participate on campaigns and attend political forms to understand the issues and get to know the candidates (Brown & Brown,

2003,; Calhoun-Brown, 1996; Harris, 1999; Tate, 1993). This institution can be seen as the foundation to African American history. Even more, it can be argued that one's political behavior is considered one of the most important benefits tied to the Black church (McClerking, 2005). Political churches are characterized as encouraging political activity, skill and political participation, fostering civic skills, communicating political activity, and organizing and mobilizing (McDaniel, 2005).

It is these characteristics that have led the way to the church's ability to aid the efforts of African Americans in politics and provide a platform for these candidates. (McClerking, 2005). Understanding this, Black churches have historically been identified to garner the support of their vote, increase the group's awareness of policies, issues and encourage civic involvement (Brown, 2003). With this in mind, one can reasonably identify the underpinning elements of the Black church that has made it an institution that is well able to address social change and influence political participation. The cohesiveness of this group impacts a positive effect on the congregation in terms of its awareness, involvement, and well-being. The development of social networks within the church will be discussed later in this chapter; however, it is mentioned at this point to draw a picture of the strong relations between the actors, congregation and pastor leader.

Politicized churches are characterized with clergy who are active and encouraging to the membership to be civically active (Calhoun-Brown, 1996; Tate, 1993). Political churches are often visited by political candidates running for election or re-election to request the support of the congregation. These visits provide a platform for the candidates to communicate their message and sometimes their record. Such access to the

congregation may be seen as approval for such candidates from the pulpit. Trusted

clergy is a significant factor in voter selection and civic engagement since members may

lean on ideology cues from the pulpit and membership to guide their voting selection.

Research has documented evidence that supports the Black church's influence on the

political participation of Blacks in politics (Dawson, Brown, and Allen 1990; Tate 1991,

1993; Brown and Wolford 1994; Harris 1994; Calhoun-Brown 1996; Harris 1999; Alex-

Assensoh and Assensoh 2001).

The literature shares that "Jesse Jackson utilized church-based political networks

in his 1984 presidential bid and Black pastors who supported the campaign used their

status and influence to encourage members to vote, give money, and work for the

campaign" (Cavanagh & Foster, 1984). In essence, Mr. Jackson utilized the influential

social networks within the church to support his bid for the White House and their ability

to diffuse information. Similarly, to Jessie Jackson, others have also turned to the Black

church when running for political office. The literature shares that President Bill Clinton

also visited Black churches during his initial bid for President in 1992 as well as the

second term in 1996 in an effort to gain electoral support (Brown, 2003).

To further this concept, Tate (1993) and Calhoun-Brown (1996) advance a list of

activities that occur in churches, which are labeled political, such as membership

conversations about political issues or hearing communication at church regarding

political campaigns. Other activities indicative of the label of "political church" are

politicians speaking at churches and encouragement by the Pastor to the congregation to

become civically active. In 2005 McClerking and McDaniel (2005) "utilized the 1993—

1994 National Politics Study conducted by the Center for the Study of Race and Politics at the University of Chicago to examine the relationship between political church exposure to various forms of political participation." The findings corroborated the political church's positive impact on individuals' actions to become civically and politically active.

Church Roles. The research supports the Black church's multi-purpose role serving its community as spiritual guide, advocate, mobilizer and social service institution (Brice and Hardy, 2015). For this reason, many have looked to the Black church to address social ills such as domestic violence, the academic achievement gap among African American students and HIV education and prevention (Williams & Jenkins, 2019; McIntosh and Curry, 2020; and Pingel, E., 2018). The study revealed that the participants of the study reported a low number of parishioners reporting involvement in abusive relationships when compared to national data.

The study suggested these results may be indicative of the infrequent sermons on domestic violence given by the participant pastors and their implementation of intervention measures to domestic violence. In conclusion, the study recommended training for clergy to be able to identify the signs of domestic violence and help those within their congregation and other victims and perpetrators Williams & Jenkins, 2019). Additionally, establishing a zero culture to domestic violence is encouraged while establishing outward relationships with organizations that perform domestic violence.

The Black church, in its multi-purpose role, has been a supporter of educational achievement in the African American community. This partnership continues today.

McIntosh and Curry's (2020) case study explored the Black churches' efficacy in supporting academic achievement for African American students. In conclusion, the Black church's support was identified as a supplement measure to a student's school and home systems and the findings revealed that the relationship with the Black church did assist African American students to perform well. By products of this relationship included students learning about their heritage from older African Americans church members through counter-storytelling (McIntosh and Curry, 2020).

Church Attendance. Church attendance is certainly a variable to building social capital and plays a major role in shaping one's religious affiliation and identification. Merino (2013) advanced Putnam and Campbell's (2010) comment that the more individuals become involved with religious networks the higher the likelihood one's civic involvement will be. In a Barna Group (2016) study that examined church attendance by triangulating the variable based on one's religious affiliation, practice and self-identification, only 31% of adults were considered practicing Christians. Barna described this as secularization when individuals do not believe in God and or identify as atheist or None, and thus found 48% of post Christians fit into this category. In a study authored by Sobolewska et al. (2015) that used data from the 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Survey a total of 2,410 respondents participated representing various religion: Islam ($n=1,140$), Christianity ($n=841$), Hinduism ($n=234$) and Sikhism ($n=164$). The authors advanced two measures to determine religious involvement: (1) religious association and (2) religious attendance being at least once a month. Study findings highlighted that religious attendance is a connector to associational life. To that end, it is important for the

Black church to reconnect with the unchurched to be there for them in times of need and understand what the needs of the community.

Putnam (2000) made famous the idea that churches build networks and social capital in the community, which helps to develop a variety of positive social goods. How the Black church builds ties to the community, fosters engagement, and a variety of positive phenomena can be seen in a variety of contexts (Hagler, 2018). Churches can develop with government and non-profit agencies in the provision of services (Eng & Hatch, 1991). Black churches have been shown to develop community ties to schools that help to enhance educational outcomes among African American youth (Mcintosh & Curry, 2020). Black Americans often turn to churches in times of need. For example, studies have shown that churches play a vital role in potentially improving the mental health of African American communities in the United States (Campbell & Winchester, 2020; Robinson, Jones-Eversley, Moore, Ravenell, & Adedoyin, 2018), both in bringing salience to the issue and in terms of direct outreach (Campbell & Littleton, 2018). Earlier work by Blank, Mahmood, Fox, and Guterbock (2002) supported the value of the church for enhancing mental health in the African American community. Furthermore, other studies have found similar effects on African Americans when the church becomes involved in health promotion initiatives in helping families seek mental health services (Allen, Davey, & Davey, 2010; Anthony, Johnson, & Schafer, 2015) and in procuring community medicine (Levin, 1984).

Black churches have also been shown to play a role in reducing domestic violence in their communities (Oliver & Esther, 2020). When inclusive at the pulpit, Black

churches may play a potentially vital role in helping with HIV prevention in the community (Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018). The Black church has also been shown to affect identities towards a variety of individual-level beliefs and practices. For example, Collins and Perry (2015) found that African American males views towards marriage and the family are greatly impacted by church attendance. Strong religiosity was found to correlate with marriage and family stability and healthy relationship modeling. Casey and Ulmer (2017) found evidence that involvement in Black Protestant churches may have a negative impact on crime in the community. This finding was supported by Bursik and Gramsick (1993) in their earlier work, in addition to a study by Shihadeh and Winters (2010) in relation to churches and crime in the Latino community.

Membership Decline. Numerous studies have also focused on the decline of Black church membership in the United States (e.g., Chatters, Taylor, & Lincoln, 1999; Martin, 2014; McRoberts, 2005). Not all commentators agree that the church is not bucking the broader trend in the decline of traditional church attendance and membership (Banks, 2015). The Pew Research Center reported that the National Baptist Convention U.S.A. was considered the largest historical Black church (Masco, 2018). The same report added that approximately 79% (i.e., eight in ten people) of African Americans identified as Christians. Considering these numbers, one might question why there is an increase in African Americans who identify as non-religious or none. One study conducted by the Pew Center reported that since the Landscape Study of 2014, the number of *Nones* had increased to 18% up from 12% when the first study was conducted.

Several factors have been explicated as contributing to this downward trend (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The first factor includes the inability of church leaders to attract millennials into the congregations. Davis and Mavo (2017) wrote that the Black church is facing a generational gap where older cohorts are passing away and the message of the importance of Jesus and God is not being passed down causing a disconnect with the younger generations. Pastors Clinkscales at Royal Baptist Church in Anderson and Reverend Kippie Brown, pastor of Springfield Baptist Church, believed that the change in a family's lineage makeup was a contributor to the diminishing youth in the church (Banks, 2015). Multiculturalism can also pose a challenge to religious groups and movements (Jenkins, 2003). Religious racial integration can also be a factor for developing successful diverse churches (Marti, 2010). As Wadsworth (2010) noted, bridging relationships for social change can occur in the multiracial church movement. However, this can be difficult if churches are not inclusive of outsiders. Churches that were more accepting played a stronger helping role to the LGBT community during the HIV/AIDS Crisis (Lewis, 2015; Quinn, Dickson-Gomez, & Young 2016). These findings provide further support for why social capital developed by churches may play a significant role in health promotion and outcomes (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004) and expanding bridging capital into the community. This can be particularly valuable for marginalized groups, such as gay African American men (Woodyard, Peterson, & Stokes, 2000).

Reggie Garrett, pastor at Jubilee Baptist Church acknowledged that leaders should be intentional about recruiting young members (Davis & Mayo, 2017). He noted that

young members matter too and falling back on his roots to a time where children were made to go, there was no choice. Today, Garrett feels youth have too many options and that it is the parents' responsibility to demand that they attend church. Reggie Garrett also acknowledged that the traditional church continues to play a very important role by advocating for social justice issues and being a spiritual anchor (Davis & Mayo 2017). Technology has been used at Garrett's church to show the younger generation that the church is moving in that direction as well as helping to make the community a better place by building a park in hopes of showing millennials (defined as ages 18 – 29 by the Pew Research Center) that God is still with them and that He was with their parents and grandparents. The appeal of a church's leader has come to the forefront as a variable that contributes to membership decline.

Research has shown that it is much easier for individuals to depart from one church for another when there are concerns with the quality of a ministry leader. For example, the Gallup (2017) study showed that members who had a higher attendance rate were more likely to rate the leader as outstanding in comparison to those who did not attend frequently. The Barna Group (2016) explained that currently, millennials are coming on the scene when there is much cynicism and skepticism felt towards the church and where the ever expansion of secularization is now happening.

Lovestone, a Greenville educator and millennial, claimed that "the church cannot be all things to all people and that it has lost its way, don't really know what is happening in the community and that they aren't actively involved. Lovestone shared that the church needs to get back to basics – which is to preach the uncompromising gospel and continue

to help those in need" (Banks, 2017).   He believes once this is done, it will in fact attract

millennials back into the church. In comparison, members at the Alfred Street church

located in Alexandria, VA, under the leadership of Reverend Howard-John Wesley

explained that their attraction to the church was the preaching, singing and community

involvement. The article goes on to describe its community outreach efforts which

involved an annual Brother's Keeper project, providing 2,000 low-income youth with

backpacks and providing health screenings for families. Not only is the church

positioning itself to be relevant to its members and the community, but it is cognizant of

being able to provide its members with flexible times to worship.

Banks (2015) wrote that a "come as you are" service is offered on Wednesday

nights that targets millennials and a power hour during summer Sunday services.

Without a doubt, there is a list of efforts that appear to be working for some of the Black

churches in their growth and retention efforts. However, Reverend Kip Banks, Interim

General Secretary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention added that the Black

church was in no way sheltered from declines experienced by so many churches. The

literature also points to being relevant and meeting the needs of the population the Black

church is attempting to attract. I sought to explore how the Black church's social capital

can appeal to those who are unaffiliated or identify as *Nones* and meet their spiritual

needs, thus becoming proactive in helping to improve their quality of life.

Social Capital

Research has distilled many positive effects between engagement in the Black

church and positive individual and community-level goods in the concept of social

capital. The value of church organizations for mobilizing community activism and particularly sustaining African American communities have been noted in research studies (Cavendish, 2000; Harvey, 2011). Putnam (2000) made the strongest public argument linking the decline of social group involvement, such as churches, to declining bonds of trust (bonding social capital) and generalized interpersonal trust (bridging social capital) that help to strengthen American communities.

Social Capital Defined. The literature describes Jane Jacobs (1961), Pierre Bourdieu (1983), James Coleman (1988) and Robert Putnam as pioneers in the development of work related to social capital. Even more, the research acknowledges James Coleman, a sociologist made the term social capital popular describing networks and the ultimate purpose for them involved achieving a goal (Hays 2002; Weaver 2011). Social capital can be said to be demonstrated in the Black church every Sunday. When one considers the history of the church, one very well could argue the point of social capital being birthed in the Black church. Many authors have written on the topic of social capital as mentioned previously. Putnam advances his definition of social capital as elements of socialization that work together producing cohesiveness that enables coordinated action for the purpose of a common goal (1995b). Similarly, Coleman espouses the presence of specific elements such as trustworthiness, the dissemination of information and norms that are attributable to maximum social capital (Stockwell, 1999).

Lang and Hornburg (1998) explained that social capital is composed of factors such as trust and norms in which one can operationalize for the purpose of problem solving.   Even more, Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or

potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less

institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (1986, p. 248).

Wuthnow (2002) explains that the presence of social capital is indicative of established

interpersonal networks that demonstrate an ability to assist in the achievement of goals.

      Forms of Social Capital. Social capital has never been regarded as one

dimensional. The literature illustrates there are several forms of social capital (Gootaert

& Bastelaer, 2002). Structural social capital is referred to as a form of social capital.

Examples of this form are networks, music and athletic groups, and neighborhood

associations. These examples are all observable structures that are visible along with

their embodied processes and rules (Gootaert & Bastelaer, 2002). The second form is

cognitive social capital, which is subjective and made up of intangible elements such as

attitudes, shared values, trust, reciprocity and norms that are generally accepted (Gootaert

& Bastelaer, 2002). These two types of social capital can reinforce each other but also

exist alone. For example, government organizations are considered structural social

capital and cognitive social capital may not be necessarily present. For purposes of this

study, the focus is on the element of networks that exist within the membership of church

congregations. Within these congregations, both structural social capital and cognitive

social capital exist as it relates to networks, relations, attitudes and trust.

      The literature (Gootaert & Bastekaer, 2002) also makes a second distinction that

allows for the elements of social capital to be isolated based on observation at the micro,

meso and macro levels. Social capital can be observed at the micro level. This level is

associated with horizontal relations such as households and individuals, that are grounded

in the values and underlying norms. Social capital is also observed at the meso level

where both horizontal and vertical relations are observed among society and individuals.

The third level that social capital is reported to be observed is the macro level, which is

associated with political environments undergirded by social activities and the quality of

government programs.

      Types of Social Capital. Social capital has been described as having two types –

bridging and bonding (McKenzie, 2010). Both are used to describe the relationships of

social networks; however, the intensity of each varies and can be defined by this element.

When one examines bridging social capital, authors have said that it looks at relationships

between different groups and the strength of them. The Black church's social capital has

been described as bonding as opposed to bridging because of the close-knit ties and

frequent interactions. Leonard and Bellamy (2010) explains that bridging social capital

has more social connections absent of the "thick-crust" found in bonding as well as less

denser networks. Wuthnow (2002) advances that bridging is likely to be composed of

less-intimate relationships also known as weak ties and consist of networks that are

heterogeneous in nature. Lu and Duff (1972) reveals a study conducted by Granovetter

(*How People Change Their* Jobs, 1970) on the topic of employment mobility that

confirmed weak ties or acquaintenances' ability to more effectively pass on job

information as opposed to close friends. Cavendish, Welch, and Leege (1998) states that

the church provides an institutional venue for people of like and different identities to

come together for social and moral engagement all hearing the same message.

Understanding that bridging social capital's interaction frequency is far less and therefore

the ability to build trust is more challenging. With that in mind, individuals across these social networks have an expectation that reciprocity will be immediate and intentional (Leonard and Bellamy, 2010).

The literature describes bridging social capital as weak ties and acquaintances that cross many different sectors. Scholars have advanced that bridging may be a means to bringing different groups together for the purpose of dealing with social ills such as access to healthcare, crime and graduation rates (Wuthnow, 2002).   Leonard and Bellamy (2010) declare that networks described as bridging are larger than bonding and composed of more people with less complex relationships. As such, McKenzie (2010) asserts that bridging social capital is able to connect diverse groups of individuals without consideration to race or class.

The literature has explained that bridging social capital is indicative of inclusiveness and seen as beneficial to society because of its ability to connect different groups together.   To that end, the research is rich in support of bridging social capital's benefit to society. For example, a study completed by Kawachi and colleagues (1997) revealed that an increase in membership in group activities posed opportunities to bridge social capital and was equally aligned with a reduction in income inequality.

Granovetter (1973) shares information about a 1969 study of 369 women that examined how communities of different socioeconomic backgrounds made up of both homophilous and heterophilous groups impact mobility opportunities. The results supported heterophilous group's ability to diffuse information unlike homogeneous and that the social structural network of heterophilous groups have a myriad of connections

and individuals are more likely to network within different groups thereby having access to information and resources which will differ from what was already communicated to individuals (1972). Advancing a challenge to operationalizing bridging, Wuthnow (2002) sees this ingredient as problematic simply because it requires individuals to operate beyond their natural close-knit networks relying on heterogeneous groups. Lastly, in a research study conducted by Yusuf (2008) that sought to connect the positive attributes bridging social capital had on economic well-being, showed one's active participation in membership associations was correlated to an increase in the household's economic

The literature describes bonding social capital as strong, exclusive, intimate, and requires more time to develop (Hansell, 1984). Weaver (2011) espouses that bonding social capital is akin to groups that are homogenous in nature sharing the same race, ethnicity, and neighborhood who are entrenched in the work. The research recognizes bonding social capital as close-knit relationships with corresponding reciprocity and benefits to families and communities. Coleman (1998) explains that the presence of trust and social cohesion among and within a community compels a spirit of obligation among members. Weaver and Habibov (2012) compared the influences of social and human capital on economic status. The study measured specific indicators, which revealed a direct correlation to higher incomes when there was communication with loved-one via the internet.

Wuthnow (2002) declares that bonding is indicative of small groups with interpersonal connections in various settings such as communities and churches.

What is more, Henly, Danziger, and Offer (2005) concluded that low-income women that received support in the form of emotional and child care from friends and family reported a lower incidence of hardships such as utility interruption, evictions and other financial coping exercises like selling blood or plasma. To counter this argument, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) suggests in an example of low-income individuals wherein relationships become dependent, this can cause a restriction to opportunities, new relationships and additional resources. To further describe the character of bonding social capital, Fafchamps and Minten (2002) collected data from agricultural traders for the purpose of determining firm productivity when impacted by social capital. Indicators used were one's relative in the business, other known and relationships with traders and potential bank lenders.

The data results validated an increase in economic productivity, which was a direct correlation with established relationships with other traders and lenders.

Bonding social capital looks at relationships within and among a network of people. These relationships are likely to be homophilous in nature, which is in direct correlation with the history of the Black church and the socialization aspect. One can argue that the homophilous state is due to the history of the Black church and African Americans being ostracized from mainstream American. Understanding that, the intuitive nature of bonding social capital would better explain the cohesiveness and tight-knit nature of the church membership. However, this study seeks to better understand the church's social capital in the greater community specifically, it's ability to bridge social capital for purposes of improving the quality of life.

Social Capital Impact. LaLone (2012) studied social capital mobilization impact on aiding the Appalachian of Pulaski County where tornadoes touched down amounting to a small environmental disaster. The author wanted readers to consider social capital networks and its usefulness in policy and program planning channels. LaLone (2012) evaluated the mobilization efforts within a one-month timeframe, after the disaster, focusing on the creation of labor and supply resources that resulted from social networks. The author recommends the integration of local resources in the process alongside the more formal ones to produce a more rapid generation of resources that have minimal resources.

Kiori's (2015) study examined Kenya's public policy and its ability to improve the quality of life for Kenyans by reducing poverty and hunger. The transformation of Kenya's economy, unfortunately, has not performed well. In fact, the opposite occurred when assessing the economic performance of the rural sector where an increase in poor people was documented. The conclusions of Kiori's study support the development of local land development strategy that incorporates social capital. Furthermore, the study findings highlighted the positive impact of social capital as enhancing the provision of public services in both rural and urban communities; attracting private enterprise to communities and oversight of common resources.

Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002a) noted that social capital has a direct impact on the public good by alleviating poverty for communities, families and individualities and improving the public welfare. This study too displays the power of social capital when activated to change and impact policies to improve the quality of life and the realization

of government to the fact that social capital can institute change from political to cultural (Ellis, 2000). In Hao's (2015) study a subset of social capital, bonding social capital, was highlighted. Bonding social capital is found in the Black church and has played a significant role in influencing the coal industry to unionize. Twelve participants, 12 males and three females, were interviewed. Two criteria set the standard for participation: had to have been union miners or associated with the UMWA and have written transcripts. The article explained some of the history of Harlan County, Kentucky coal miners' strategies used to generate large amounts of social capital. The author, Hao, provided many definitions of well-known practitioners to describe social capital; however, Hao's focus was on bonding social capital because it more closely describes the close ties that existed within the community of coal miners. A homogeneous network is appropriate to describe the coal miners' relationships. Hao's study also examined a generation of social capital through workplace associations and concluded with the Hao creating a framework that displayed how social capital ties of the miners were successfully mobilized into a social movement in the 1930's when the miners organized into un ions. As noted by Johnson, Jang, Li, and Larson (2000) the church can play the role of social control agent, reducing crime and creating other positive goods that bond a community together. Such cultural mechanism can structure relationships in neighborhoods and reduce violence, as well as maintain social control (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011).

In Strouble's (2015) study of racism vs. social capital he denotes the importance of social capital's presence to ensure a community's viability and sustainability. When communities rely on one another they are more apt to navigate instances where resources

are limited or depleted.   While this study is not related to racism, Strouble (2015) points out that members within communities must come together and build its social capital towards repairing trust, establishing a sense of community and increasing its capacity. These efforts will undergird the community's ability to solve problems and create change agents to ensure the change is sustainable.

It is important to point out that this research study focuses on Robert Putnam's (1993) social capital theory as it relates to the relational element of networks within the Black church. To that end, both studies highlight the positive function of social capital when used to move humanity forward.

Some argued that social capital when used in the form of discourse is a menace to society (Heath and Waymer, 2014). The authors conclude in their study of Terrorism: Social capital, social construction and constructive society? of how the use of public relations provides leverage for terrorist groups to create social capital and advance their work in society.   For instance, in 2011 when the terrorist group Al- Qaeda used hi-jacked airplanes to disrupt the economic and social capital of the United States. Heath and Waymer points out that visibility as social capital is one of the first resources necessary to market and publicize skills, abilities and values. They go on to define terrorism as the intentional attacks against civilian populations for the purpose of intimidation and advancing their issue (Heath and Waymer, 2014). The September 11th act of violence triggered the activation of social capital among Al-Qaeda's supporters and became a recruiting tool.

However, before the tragedy of 911, the use of social capital to enact mayhem was used by John Brown an abolitionist who believed in opposing any efforts to maintain slavery (Heath and Waymer, 2014). John Brown became an iconic figure in the 1859 Harpers Ferry attack as he led a small band in the uprising of slaves. While Brown was unsuccessful in his efforts, his revolt was regarded as a mobilized social movement intended to abolish slavery (Heath and Waymer, 2014).

Agger and Jensen (2015) conducted a study between February 2011 and April 2012 on urban regeneration and how area-based initiatives (ABIs) can play a positive role in building trusting relationships between civil society and municipal government. Data were collected via a survey and three case studies with a total of 26 interviews of either individuals or focus groups in three locations. Participants were characterized as citizens, Area Based Initiatives' staff as well as individuals representing volunteer organizations. Agger and Jensen shared how ABIs can prove beneficial in improving the neighborhoods of need or deprived communities by connecting them with institutions and individuals in authority via bonding, bridging and linking social capital. ABI's are characterized as having numerous partnerships that spans the community to non-governmental and government actors working together and forming relations toward a common cause. Such a cause could be related to employment, housing or health disparities.

Agger and Jensen shared that ABIs focus is on communities participating in a horizontal structure that aims to address problems and concerns related to quality of life. This study examined the close relationships or bonding social capital of stakeholders in communities that participate in ABIs to make a difference. Thus, the study findings

validated that ABIs contribute to the development of linking social capital, which is defined as facilitating meetings between groups or individuals and those in positions of political and financial power. Other studies by Lee (2006; 2008) highlighted the value of such civic community for developing stable social structures. The value of civic engagement, in a related vein, and moral communities was also echoed by Lee and Bartkowski's (2004) work.

Summary

The literature review covered several variables such as the role of the church, the politicization of the church and the history that played a key role in exploring the application of social capital in the greater community by Black churches. Social capital was an important part of the study especially because it has been defined and studied by many scholars. Studies used to support Putnam's social capital theory showed how the resources inherent in social capital have been activated to address common causes all over the world for the better. The forms and types were reviewed as well as the impact of social capital application varies widely in areas such as coal mining unionization (Hao, 2015), urban regeneration (Agger & Jensen, 2015), economic well-being (Weaver, McMurphy, & Habibov, 2013), assisting job seekers in China (Obukhova & Zhang, 2016-2017), reducing poverty and inequality (Kirori, 2015), activating local-level networks in response to disasters (LaLone, 2012), and improving the quality of life and social justice in Mashad, Iran (2017).

The history of the Black church was also explored. The research indicated that the Black church rose during the Civil Rights Movement to a powerhouse position and took

the lead in addressing social justice in the form of peaceful marches, sit-ins, and voter registration campaigns. These activities continued for some time with the church's leadership giving voice against social ills and the plight of African Americans and the call to action.

Church pastors, then and now, yielded an enormous amount of influence on their congregation and individuals seeking political office that they would soon recognize the importance of the Black church and its voting power. It has been said that the church is the greatest generator of social capital recognizing the networks that are created within the church and the characteristics of those relationships. These relationships have been described as bonding social capital, which takes into consideration its exclusive nature wherein individuals have shared norms, trust, class and are homogenous in nature. These networks offer far reaching benefits and can provide the necessary supports necessary to impact one's quality of life. These benefits, for the most part, remain within the confines of the network, which is described as dense in nature.

Currently, the literature has provided insight into why individuals become religiously unaffiliated including but not limited to the passing away of older cohorts, the church being homophobic and the church being all things to all people. However, there is sparse information or studies that have applied the social capital of the Black church in the greater community towards re-engaging the unchurched and reconnecting with the community. There exists a gap in the body of knowledge on this topic. However, the current research study sought to close the gap and provide a framework to reconnec with the community and re-engage the unchurched. Although many studies have examined the

impact of social capital in various sectors, there is a lack of research that provides

evidence that the Black church can in fact apply its social capital in the greater

community for greater outcomes that will benefit the Black church, unchurched and the

community as a whole.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how the Black church can re-engage the unchurched and reconnect with the community it serves. Qualitative research seeks to understand foundational elements of the topic under study and the social context (Janesick, 2011). This qualitative method of inquiry takes into consideration the whole picture while examining relationships. As this approach seeks to understand the full picture, engaging participants in the data collection phase is necessary. It is this engagement that provides a pathway to collecting the perspectives and behaviors of many in hopes of identifying resolution to the problem. This inductive approach lent itself to the exploratory nature of this qualitative research study because the population under study was African American adults in the Black Church who held leadership positions and were actively involved in the facilitation of community events. The data collection took place in the natural setting. Multiple data collection strategies, (i.e., interviews, field notes and journaling) were used to collect data to provide me with a greater understanding of the topic.

Research Design and Approach

The research design for this study advanced a qualitative approach with a case study inquiry involving three Black churches in West Palm Beach. Qualitative research provides an approach for exploring and understanding a group of people or human problem (Creswell, 2009). As such, with this study I sought to understand the Black Church's multipurpose role in building social capital in the Black community.

Specifically, I explored the problem of how the Black church can use its social capital towards re-engaging the unchurched and reconnecting with the community.

I applied purposeful sampling to identify the data sources, specifically those who could share their rich experiences. Data sources will assist in contributing to the body of knowledge by providing the evidence that may advance some church's ability to establish bonding social capital outside of its congregation. This may arrest the decline of church membership by re-engaging the unchurched and reconnecting with the community in a meaningful way. The purpose of this study was to explore how Black churches in West Palm Beach, Florida used their social capital to re-engage the unchurched members as well as engage their community.

In doing so, findings may highlight opportunities for the church to engage individuals who are unchurched and build relationships moving forward resulting in long-term engagement. A review of the literature indicated validation of bonding social capital in Black churches through consistent attendance and engagement in church activities. On the contrary, there is little to no evidence of studies about how the church goes about reconnecting with the unchurched and bridging its social capital among dissimilar or heterogeneous groups. The reality is there is underutilization of assets in our community that could very well be engaged for bridging both inclusive and exclusive networks culminating in increased church attendance, growing congregations, and helping to meet the people's spiritual, emotional and financial needs.

This study involved gathering the perspectives and lived experiences of Black church leaders who are African American and played an active role in the coordination of

community events. I used a case study design approach, which is aligned with exploring

culture, people or an event, particularly the Black church's multipurpose use of social

capital. A case study design approach was used to answer the research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How are Black churches using social capital to

engage the unchurched members?

Research Question 2: How do Black churches foster bridging and bonding using

social capital in their community?

To address these questions, I used a qualitative case study method of inquiry. This

approach has been around for some time as a qualitative strategy. Creswell (2009)

advanced that this approach allows the researcher to explore the very details of a culture,

event, one person or people. Stake (1995) stated that case study seeks to understand the

activity of a single issue and complexity of that activity. Janesick (2011) surmised that

the case study should be of importance to the social sciences and also align with realistic

situations that may not have been studied by others in the past.

Role of the Researcher

My role was that of a participant. The professional position held by myself was as

the Executive Director of a nonprofit, involved in working with church leaders,

businesses, residents and other non-profits to revitalize the community through the

programs and services offered by partners.   Access to study participants was sought

directly through the gate keepers of the church. The gatekeepers were members of the

church who work closely with leadership and depended on to bring forth all requests

such as this to the leadership for a final decision. Engagement with study participants,

was managed based on the church's leadership decisions, for which I had no authority or power to circumvent the decisions made.

I identified participants by introduction and provided an explanation of the research process. For the purpose of minimizing bias, I used the tools of bracketing, reflexivity and hermeneutics as described in the data collection procedures to facilitate awareness and ensure my lived experiences did not influence or taint the interpretation of the data.

A total of three Black churches were identified to participate in the study. The data collection setting took place inside the churches and one community center during Sunday service or bible study—which typically occurred on Tuesday or Wednesday nights. This set up provided more convenience and access to participants. Prior to the beginning of the data collection process I met with each church leader or gatekeeper and discussed the research process, shared the semi-structured interview guide with them and asked them to share the information with church leaders to ensure full cooperation and approval. The participants were African American adults (males and females) 18 years of age and older who were considered leaders within their respective churches and played an active role in the coordination and facilitation of community activities.

Methodology

The research study targeted African American leaders in the Black church who played a role in the planning and delivery of events and community outreach efforts. Qualitative design advances many sampling strategies such as random, probability, convenience and purposeful selection. Each sampling strategy is unique to the decisions

that must be made by the researcher while taking into consideration the parameters of the research study. For purposes of this study, I employed the purposeful selection to activate the sampling strategy. Maxwell (2013) declared that "in this strategy particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that can't be gotten as well from other choices." (p. 97)

Sampling Method

Creswell (2009) explained that researchers select purposeful sampling to identify participants for the study to create a clear understanding of the research problem believing that those participants will provide rich and relevant data. Furthermore, Patton (2002) surmised that researchers choose purposeful sampling to highlight the problem under study and anticipate participants' contribution to be extremely valuable. The purposeful sampling approach ensured that the participants' perspective about the research problem was the focus during data collection and analysis. As such, this research study sought to engage individuals who were active members of the identified churches, because this would have lent itself to identifying strong and weak ties and associations within auxiliaries.

Sample Population

A sample size of six data sources from participants across the three Black churches was established. Participants were selected based on specific criterion. Participants included church leaders who were African Americans who were active in the facilitation of community events. This criterion was shared with all gatekeepers before

gaining access to the research site, since I and gatekeepers worked together to identify eligible individuals.

Utilizing purposeful sampling assisted in the identification of individuals who were able to contribute rich data relevant to the study. Church leaders that held positions such as the Pastor and/or Senior Pastor, Deacon and/or Deaconess or auxiliary group leaders were sought out to participate in the research study. These informants were purposefully selected based on the inclusion criteria.

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative design advances specific protocols for researchers prior to and during data collection. Creswell (2009) set out the steps involved in data collection procedures first starting with the research sites. Three research sites were identified for this study. These sites were selected by the research for three reasons: (1) each church had been in existence for 90 years or longer; (2) the congregations were very diverse in age, professionals with fraternities, sororities, and civic groups affiliations, and (3) all hosted many community outreach events throughout the year. Care and concern were used in the approach to engage the gatekeepers. Such care was important not only is negotiating access important, but researchers must continue to maintain the relationships throughout the data collection process to the extent of renegotiating them if need be (Maxwell, 2013).

Along those same lines, once access was granted, it was incumbent on me to ensure the participants were comfortable. I paid close attention to my relationship with the participants recognizing that an objective viewpoint must be taken. Also, I was

mindful to advance a transparent data collection process with the use of the informed

consent while also being prepared to answer any questions the participants had.

Bracketing

Researchers must be aware of the biases and assumptions they bring into the

fieldwork and be prepared to address them. I employed the use of bracketing to keep

assumptions in abeyance. Fischer (2008) shared that bracketing refers to identifying the

researchers own experiences, worldview, and opinions that could influence the

interpretation of the data. Furthermore, Tufford and Newman (2010) surmised that

bracketing in qualitative research is applied to avoid misguided opinions that could

potentially harm the research study. Additionally, bracketing also allows me to reflect on

the information gathered on a deeper level thereby facilitating a fresh view of the data.

Fischer (2008) stated that some elements of one's lived experiences are not measurable

by traditional methods and require a more in-depth re-examination and a breaking down,

if you will, of those experiences while seeking meaning and a greater understanding of

one's preconceptions that may have found its way into the sense-making aspect.

Reflexivity

Akin to bracketing is reflexivity and hermeneutics. The process of reflexivity

involves me being in-tuned with the data and being open minded to wherever it took me.

Fischer (2008) advanced that reflexivity compels the researchers to examine the impact

the data has had connecting same with their own experiences while being aware of the

applied understanding that has been given to the exercise. Reflexivity also takes into

consideration the participants' experiences and additional viewpoints, disclosures and

backgrounds, that are revealed through data collection seeking to understand other

perspectives. The exercise of reflexivity is an on-going process that was applied beyond

the data collection phase. Reflexivity helped me to check the self-awareness box while

continuing to re-examine the information identifying emerging meanings.

Hermeneutics

Similar to reflexivity is hermeneutic—the process of making meaning. Fischer

(2008) explained that hermeneutic identifies two aspects. These aspects are: (1) the

engagement humans have in the world and the meaning they give to those interactions;

and (2) humans being focused on their own interpretations without a forensic

examination of the various data components individually. The hermeneutic process

advances the notion that initial interpretations may shift with new insights and

understanding compelling the researcher to look back at the data and the initial meaning

given to the information and prescribing to a new meaning.

Interviews

I independently verified the interpretation of data collected with each respondent

prior to finalizing same. Creswell (2009) advanced that the accuracy of data

interpretation can be checked by the researchers by debriefing with the respondent. I

agreed that this too was part of the sense-making process, and that it ensured that the

participants' realities were accurately interpreted and defined. Creswell (2009) advanced

four types of data collection options: (1) observations, (2) interviews, (3) documents, and

(4) audio-visual materials. Each method of data collection has its strengths and

limitations. For this research study, the method of interviewing was identified as the best

approach to learn about the participants' lived experiences. Additionally, an interview is defined as a method by which one can better understand events and actions that occurred previously without the benefit of observing these actions (Maxwell, 2013)

Research has also highlighted that method of interviewing as it allows the researchers to understand what is in the mind of the participant and also provides a lens into one's point of view (Patton, 2002). To that end, this approach provided each participant an opportunity to share their perception of the Black Church's ability to build social capital in the community, the strategies that can be employed to create trust and build relationships amongst weak ties and inactive church members, in addition to their lived history involving social capital in the Black church. Additionally, participants had an opportunity to share their ideas, experiences, perceptions and opinions in detail according to their worldview.

Instrumentation

Within the category of data collection is the need to identify the instrumentation used in the research study. An interview protocol was used as the data collection instrument in this research study. The interview protocol was created by me and contained open-ended questions. This instrument was administered by me during the semi-structured interview. The use of an interview protocol required me to create the questions in advance, give considerable attention to the questions being developed to ensure that they served to provide an understanding of the research problem and was aligned with the research questions. These procedures were undertaken based on Maxwell (2013) research where it was noted that it is important for the researcher to have

a good understanding of how the data collection strategies will work when put into practice.

Qualitative design advances many data collection methods, and each can speak to its ability to ensure content validity. Maxwell shared Miles and Huberman's (1994, p. 262) checklist that can be used to test for content validity.   For purposes of this study, I incorporated the following strategies to prevent misunderstandings and verify conclusions of the research problem. The first strategy employed was related to the extended period in the environment. Maxwell (2013) shared that prolonged presence in the environment lends itself to cancelling out theories and understanding the respondents' perspective. Also, member checking was performed with all participants. Specifically, with the use of an in person or phone follow-up the accuracy of the my interpretation of the data collected was verified which also guarded again any biases.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an important element in qualitative research. Qualitative data analysis should be performed in a timely manner. Researchers are encouraged to start the analysis process once the data are collected because the information is still fresh in the researcher's mind. This includes a review of the data and any memos taken at that time. Maxwell (2013) noted that data analysis is a continuous process and begins after the first interview and continues throughout the research. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) also shared that data collection should occur at the same time as data analysis (as cited in Maxwell, 2013). Within this study the data analysis process began with data collection from each participant through an interview protocol that contained open-ended questions.

All data collected were reviewed, then organized by way of manual coding and prepared for understanding and sense making. Topics were separated into a small number of emergent themes. The purpose of coding is to place data into "categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (Maxwell, 2013, p.107). I sought to describe the research site and setting in detail in addition to the participants and the community within which the research sites were located.

Validity and Reliability

Part of qualitative research design involves ensuring validity—akin to the correctness of the data collected—and reliability with respect to the appropriate procedures related to the qualitative design. I utilized various strategies to guard against threats to validity and researcher bias. First, I spent prolonged time in the natural setting of the Black church. Maxwell (2013) shared that intensive, long-term involvement in the research setting is effective at ensuring validity. Spending time in the natural setting allowed me to collect valuable rich data that lent itself to a better understanding of the research problem through participants' viewpoints shared during the interviews. I engaged in member checking to ensure validity. This strategy involved following-up with each participant and sharing my perspective on the data collected and providing an opportunity for revisions to take place. Reliability helps in ensuring that the approach and steps are consistent with qualitative design from beginning to end. Reliability was achieved by proofing the information for errors and ensuring the coding process did not shift from its original meaning.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical considerations are an important component of any research study. It therefore follows that, researchers have a responsibility to be prepared for any issue that may arise during data collection. Researchers must respect study participants and the research sites (Creswell, 2009). Before engaging with the participant, a formal review process was completed as part of the Walden University Institutional Review Board's (IRB). The IRB has both external and internal ethical responsibilities. IRB's external ethical mandates outlined the appropriate treatment of participants.

Creswell (2009) stated that the IRB process takes into consideration the risk or marginalization of humans as it relates to physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harm. The IRB procedure is a recognized process that is utilized to protect vulnerable populations in a research study. Along with the evaluation, I submitted an informed consent form (ICF) for IRB review and approval. The ICF included specific elements such as the benefits for participating. Additionally, the ICF provided participants with information about their rights, how the data would be used, as well as several other things.

I was responsible for reviewing the ICF with each participant thoroughly and required a signature before they were allowed to participate in the research study. This procedure was utilized to address ethical issues and to ensure that both me and participants were on the same level

The procedure was key to ensuring participants were comfortable and at ease to allow rich dialogue to be exchanged relative to the research problem. My ability to

establish a good rapport and environment conducive to the cultivation of relationships with the participant was vital. Notably, Creswell advanced additional ethical considerations that researchers must ponder, including gaining access to research sites.

For purposes of this study, I provided written correspondence to all leaders at the identified sites detailing what to expect during the interviews and the duration of the interviews (Creswell, 2009). Caution was taken to minimize disruptions of the churches' day-to-day activities by informing leaders of a specific amount of time needed for the interview. Although I did not foresee any issues gaining access to the various sites, the practice of reciprocity was exercised. Specifically, I worked with each site in a collaborative manner, especially with regards to data analysis and member checking.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how the Black church could use its social capital to re-engage the unchurched and connect with the community it serves. To answer this research questions three congregations in West Palm Beach, Florida were utilized. I utilized an interview tool to collect data by way of purposeful sampling of six participants.

How do three Black churches in West Palm Beach, Florida foster bridging and bonding social capital in their community amongst the un-churched? Exploring the above research question assisted me to understanding a pathway to providing strategies on how the Black church could be relevant to the population it seeks to re-engage, reconnect with and help to meet the comprehensive needs of individuals.

Advancing a case study design may also create a roadmap to understanding the impact of the church's social capital in the greater community towards greater diffusion of information and opportunities by way of bonding and bridging activities. To ensure validity of data, member checking, recording of interviews and prolonged visits in the natural environments was completed. Additional data collection methods utilized included field notes and journaling.

Chapter 4: Results

The Black church has long been referred to as an institution that addresses the social and moral issues of its congregation and community (Brice & Hardy, 2015). The Black church's social capital has been an important element towards the building of trust among its membership. However, sparse research exists that validated the Black church's social capital in the greater community that helped to improve one's quality of life.

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black churches in West Palm Beach, Florida used their social capital to re-engage the unchurched members as well as engage their community. In this chapter, a summary of the setting, demographics, the number of participants, how the data were collected, analyzed and any unusual situations encountered is provided. Robert Putnam's social capital theory, specifically the relational element guided the research questions: How are Black churches using social capital to engage the unchurched members? How do Black churches foster bridging and bonding using social capital in their community? Study findings may provide the faith community with a better understanding of how best to meet the needs of the community and strategies on engaging the unchurch.

Research Questions

The study was intended to answer two research questions:

Research Question 1: How are Black churches using social capital to engage the unchurched members?

Research Question 2: How do Black churches foster bridging and bonding using social capital in their community? In order to gain a deeper understanding of the

phenomena, the following open-ended interview questions were administered to church leaders who interacted with the members and unchurch for the purpose of illuminating their lived experiences: (a) Describe the social activities in the church that have a spill over impact into the greater community; (b) What are some outreach activities that the church could facilitate that would appeal to the unchurched and build trust? (c) How can the unchurched play a role in building relationships in the community? (d) How does the church go about inviting the community to participate in community events? (e) How is the church using its social capital to engage the unchurched and grow its membership? and (f) How are nonmembers treated when attending church? Is there a follow-up protocol?

Research Setting

The three church sites as well as the fourth site—one of the churches' community center—are all located in West Palm Beach, Florida**.** The use of the church sites to conduct the interviews was approved by each pastor and coordinated by three individuals, one from each church**,** designated by each church pastor**.** The announcement requested volunteers who wanted to participant in this research study giving the title of same.

Respondents gave their names and numbers to a point person at the church, with whom I followed up. I reached out to each church contact via the telephone and explained the details of the study, provided content to be announced in church, and followed up with each participant. I ensured validity by recording each participant's interview and sharing the transcribed information for member checking. Creswell (2009) noted that validity is determined by relying on study participants, me, or others to confirm an

account. As such, each participant was asked to review and notate approval of the

transcribed interview. Member checking has been suggested by Creswell (2009) as a

means to validate the accuracy of the findings by sharing them with research participants

and seeking their approval.

Additionally, I proofread the transcribed information for errors numerous times

and meticulously reviewed the codes and separated them during the data analysis process

involving deductive and inductive coding process. I used both predetermined codes,

which were deductive in nature and applied to the first level coding. Inductive coding,

which involved those codes that emerged during the discovery process, were also

utilized. Although both of these processes are used in qualitative analysis, Patton (2002)

shared that inductive coding is often applied early in the process and assists in the

development of the codebook. Creswell (2009) also adds this is the customary approach

in social sciences.

Data collection of each participant took place on church grounds, each located in

West Palm Beach, Florida. I selected participants by way of purposeful sampling.

Creswell (2009) articulates that the premise behind qualitative research is to identify

those participants who will help me to the greatest degree comprehend the problem and

answer the research questions. Respondents of purposeful sampling helped to highlight a

greater understanding of the research problem by sharing their lived experiences during

the interviews in connection with the research problem. Identifying church members from

the various churches based on the inclusion criteria helped me to learn more from those

who interact with the unchurched and community, than by gathering data from the

general population (Patton, 2002). As such, this technique compelled me to consider who would be most appropriate to be a participant and able to provide information-rich responses.

Therefore, the criteria for the sample population requested prospects who were church leaders, African Americans and who actively participated in the facilitation of community outreach events. The three contacts provided me with participants' names and contact information. One participant was provided with the consent form in advance and the remaining participants were provided with the consent form at the time of the interview and consent was given by each participant. I allowed adequate time for each participant to review the informed consent form and ask any questions they may have had before commencing the interview. All participants received a copy of the final executed informed consent form.

Data Collection

Walden University's IRB provided approval for data collection on April 24, 2019. The study had a sample size of six participants (one male and five females) who held leadership positions in the church. These individuals were interviewed face-to-face. The interviews were coordinated with participants by way of telephone based on their availability. Five of the six interviews took place at a church site and the remaining at the church's community center.

The interviews took place on the following dates: May 7, May 17, May 26, May 29, June 2 and June 5, 2019. The ICF was explained to each participant, pointing out the purpose of the research study and the processes that would be followed. Each participant

was made aware that participation was completely voluntary and if at any time fatigue

was experienced, a break in the interview could be taken; however, this option was not

utilized by any of the participants. Each participant was made aware that the interview

would be electronically recorded prior to the interview and again at the time of the

interview. All participants agreed to be recorded. I met with each participant either at one

of the three churches or one community center. The interviews lasted between 15 and 50

minutes. Additionally, field notes were taken that detailed the settings and any activities

that were occurring at the same time in the buildings. I summarized the field notes

containing her thoughts on the interviews. These notes detailed additional social activities

not already listed by me. These included a shower van, a community garden project and

Fresh Church. Other field notes included the emotional expressions of participants when

talking about the youth.

I recorded that all participants exhibited a sense of urgency in their words and

emotional expressions to reach the unchurched and bring them into the church. Patton

(2002) shared that note taking helps identify non-verbal cues of importance that are not

recorded and helps to ensure the study is proceeding in the direction hoped for. Also, it is

critical for researchers to be aware of their biases; as such I guarded against bias with the

use of member checking and bracketing. As stated in the data collection section,

bracketing was implemented to avoid the tainting of the process with personal lived

experiences.

Bracketing was implemented by allowing the participants' words to guide me and

place my words in brackets particularly when it came to identifying categories. For

example, while I identified traditions across all churches, the data did not support it as playing a role in reaching the community through modern technology since all of the churches use social media to market their institutions. As such, the term tradition was bracketed out. Also, the technique of reflexivity was exercised as a means of self-awareness and to ensure my perspective was not shaping the research. Variations experienced in data collection included the robustness of answers to the semi-structured interview questions from some of the participants.

In terms of unusual circumstances encountered in data collection, I got a chance to experience a new youth program after interviewing one of the participants at the church site. Although this experience did not affect the research process it provided insight for youth recruitment and activities that appealed to that population. Table 1 below details the gender of the six participants as well as the positions held within their respective churches. Additionally, Table 2 provides information related to the number of participants, interview locations, the date the interview occurred, the number of transcribed pages based on their interview, and interview detail that summarized the respondent's feelings towards the church.

Table 1

Participant Profile

Participant Identifier	Leadership Role	Gender
P1	Feeding Ministry Usher; Neighborhood Cleanup	Male
P2	Deaconess & Feeding Ministry	Female
P3	Outreach Ministry	Female
P4	Feeding Ministry	Female
P5	Youth Ministry	Female
P6	Deaconess; Youth Ministry; New Member Teacher	Female

Table 2

Interview Detail

Participant	Interview Location	Interview Date	Interview Duration	Transcript Pages	Interview Details
P1	Site 1	May 7th	15 mins	2	Desired to reach the unchurched.
P2	Site 1	May 17th	50 mins	3	Loves the church.
P3	Site 2	May 26th	39 mins	7	Excited to be able to help anyone in need.
P4	Site 3	May 29th	27 mins	4	Proud to share what the church is doing in the community.
P5	Site 4	June 2nd	21 mins	4	Passion for youth.
P6	Site 4	June 5th	38 mins	4	Believes it is important to show we care.

Note. Mins=minutes.

Data Analysis

In this chapter the processed identified in Chapter 3 that outlined these steps involved in the data analyses procedure: (a) reviewed the data, (b) organized data by way of manual coding, (c) separated the topics into a small number of categories based on patterns and repeated words and phrases that emerged, (d) described the research sites, (e) described the study participants, and (f) described the communities in which the sites were located, are presented. I was able to make sense of the data after listening to each

participant recordings in its entirety three times, transcribing same, reviewing the field

notes, and conducting member checking for accuracy of the transcript.

My primary coding was completed through the use of deductive coding based on

responses to the research questions. Creswell (2009) explained that allowing the data to

emerge, also known as deductive coding, is the customary approach to the social

sciences. This process allows for unexpected and unusual text to be formulated, labeled

and categorized before making sense of it.

The theoretical framework that guided the study was Robert Putnam's social

capital theory, exploring the element of networks. Putnam's theory consists of

dimensions such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate action and

cooperation or mutual benefit of an organization. Understanding this, I explored the

element of networks to the extent of determining what networks existed in the church,

and to what extent the networks participated in activities that spilled over into the greater

community. The second-level round of coding was conducted while reading through each

participants' responses to the interview questions taking a line by line approach. The

second-level round of coding resulted in 122 codes (Appendix F) resulting from

responses to the interview questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and RQ2 that examined ways to build

relationships in the community.

Final Frequency Table

Appendix F

Theme	Definition	Second Level Coding	Total codes
Community Outreach	Participants mentioned activities churches participate in that spill over into the community.	community breakfast, neighborhood cleanup, walk the neighborhood, picnic, youth choir, Thanksgiving And Christmas baskets, movie night, flyers, bulletin, invitations miss the community, collaborations, free services offered, find out what their needs are, sick and shut in, back to school project, shower van, clothing drive, feed everyone, food pantry, Deaconesses visit sick and shut in, give communion	21
Come as You Are	Participants felt strongly about receiving People as they are in church and out-Side of church without regard to Socio-economic status or back-Ground. No judgement.	Personal invitation to friends and family, meet people where they are, not look down on people, bougy church reputation, dealing with stigmas, being a felon, in the judicial system, domestic Violence, single parent families, LGBT issues, address Stigmas, church traditions, do not by into street Ministry, gay and lesbian, community did not feel right Coming into church, shower van, 4th Sunday come as You are, a deacon was homeless, accept them, get Them here, come as you are, struggles, connecting The unsaved, people in the park come to church.	24
Attracting the Youth	Participants all express urgency around this theme and the need to attract and recruit youth in a non-traditional manner.	youth choir, Twin Lakes housing project, get the atten-tion of the parents, movie night, where do we get the young people, going to Stoney Brook apartment com-Plex, Parents have to be on board, young single mothers, the kids realize that we feed them, tutoring, aftercare, why kids not here, white church, Christ fellowship, strategic with my pick, core team, young people doing nothing, catchy, don't want to spend money, bible study, incentive, get them here, accept them, come as you are, connecting the unsaved, hook the youth, parent drop youth off, miss a kid, pick up the phone and call, fresh church, youth department, oratorical contest, take youth to the zoo, youth participate in congress, beaches	35
Relationship Building w/unchurched	This theme evoked emotion among the participants as the underlying feelings were the church must create ways to connect with the unchurched and community and be con-sistent about it.	Pastor meets them at the door, ushers make it known there are visitors, visitors acknowledged by leader-ship, Pastor shakes hands at the door, no official protocol to follow-up with visitors, when visiting given an opportunity to speak, they are recognized, thank you letters sent to them, building relationship Outside the church, sign-in book, open the doors to a general meeting, fellowship, socialize and have dinner, need to know neighbors, without putting expectation on people, meet people where they are, drove them from the church, collaborations that attract community residents and unchurched, showing visitors love, lending a helping hand, we are not competing for members..	21
Understanding Community Needs	Participants expressed ways Their respective church could Learn what the needs of families And individuals are once a Relationship has started to be Cultivated.	churches' responsibility to help, preconceived feelings about the church, he shed tears and opened up about his situation, he was invited to come to church the following Sunday, going out to Stoney Brook apart-ments, how do we break into that population and Get them here, collaboration and working together	

Similar and repeated words and or phrases were grouped in the same category. From this point, I was able to identify patterns and constructed themes that expressed a natural relationship between the categories. The third-level round of coding streamlined the 122 second-level codes down to 70. During this round, some codes were eliminated due to their infrequency. Subsequently, the coded data assisted with the development of themes, that aligned to the theoretical framework and research questions. Table 3 illustrates the relationships between the 70 third-level round of codes, research questions, interview questions, and themes that emerged.

Table 3

Coding Framework

Primary	Third Level	Themes	RQ Connected to Theme	Interview Question Connected to Theme
Feeding Ministry	Ministry outside the walls of the church; resources; neighborhood; food baskets; Greeks; Collaborations; Info Sharing; Garden project, Homeless, Fresh vegetables; Meditate & relax; Teach healthier eating, and at the park;	Community Outreach activities	1 & 2	1
Neighborhood Cleanup				
Deacons & Deaconess				
Picnic Committee				
Missionary				
Outreach				
Community Garden				
Youth ministry				
Health ministry	Building rela-tionships; Knocking on doors; don't need to be a member, God, kids, parents, Unchurched, Everyone takes it among them-selves to invite people, meet people where they are, don't look down on people, bougie church, stigmas	Come as you are	2	2, 3, 4, 5 & 6
Social Media				
	Meet them where they are; Need to know our neighbors; talk about stigmas; the church is a business; tithes & offerings; listen to the people that are paying the money; Older generation, LGBTQ, felon, Single mother; Change of mindset from the top; Call things out;	Relationship building w/unchurched	2	2,3, 4, 5, & 6

(table continues)

Primary	Third Level	Themes	RQ Connected to Theme	Interview Question Connected to Theme
	Are you going in listen; accept them, ministry outside the walls			
	Accept them, If you are doing Sunday school the same way back when I was here that's why kids are not here; single mothers, where are the youth, Christ Fellowship, Research, core team, doing absolutely nothing, Fresh church, come as you are, social media, make it catchy, the plug, planet shakers, bring one friend, follow up w/parents, when you have a full stomach you can concentrate on Jesus, letting them know they are welcome	Attracting the Youth	1 & 2	2, 3, 4, 5, & 6
	Recognize visitors, Address stigmas, Collaborations, Communication, Door to door Campaign, Call things out for what they are, they want to know are you going to listen, homeless, back in the day someone would get up and give a testimony, when they get here we have to accept them, come as you are	Understanding Community Needs	2	2, 3, 4 & 5

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Part of my responsibility was to establish credibility. One method used to ensure credibility was member checking. Member checking included following up with each participant via phone and or email to verify the accuracy of their transcripts. Each participant, with the exception of P1, approved their transcript in writing. P1 passed away before approving the transcript. Furthermore, at all three sites I took advantage of the extended periods within the natural setting. Notably, at Site 1, the interview was conducted in the basement of the church where they hold celebrations, dinners, and Friday night movies for the youth and other events. At the time of the interview, bible study was beginning, and the members had opened up with hymns.

At the second site, I met in the church basement. The church basement at this site was set up with round tables that seat eight persons. There were about 12 tables set up in the basement in addition to other rooms, such as the church's secretary office and conference room. The hall was set up very nicely to receive guests, as this is where their feeding takes place in addition to their community meetings, bible study, health fairs, and other events. When I met with P3, the participant was in the kitchen as they had recently fed the community through their feeding ministry. The participant finished up in the kitchen and joined me in the dining hall. On the wall was a big screen television where the morning service could be viewed.

The fourth research site was at the church's community center. The initial spot to conduct the interview was just inside the lobby and had to be changed due to noise and the foot traffic coming into the building for a meeting. Therefore, me and participant

relocated to another location adjacent to the lobby to a big conference table but could still view parents arriving to the Bridges program. The community center was fairly new and had two floors. Part of the second floor was occupied by Bridges at West Palm Beach who provides services to low-income families. Also, a community health center is planned for the space on the second floor. It is a beautiful building and provides services to all ages with various programs being offered from the site.

The fourth research site was an education center, which is affiliated with one of the church sites. The researcher met and interviewed participant P5 in the basement of the church. The participant was preparing for a youth program that started at 10:15 a.m. and the team members who assisted with the facilitation had started to arrive. The set up provided chairs for the youth to sit in one area and in another was a wall with a drawing that illustrated who they were. The drawing was done by the youth. Youths were allowed to be on their phones until the program started. Once it started, they were expected to put the phones away. This site setup included a stage, for those who would lead praise and worship and musical instruments (e.g., drums). Colorful posters lined the walls where the youth would be seated for praise and worship that gave inspiration and affirmations. Parents are required to drop the youth off or the youth director would ensure the church bus picks them up for church and drops them off at home after service.

My last participant P6 was interviewed in the dining hall of the church. On this day other female congregants, including the coordinator of the interviewees, were at the location. Upon my arrival, the participant had just completed separating food with the assistance of the other females, for the food ministry. The dining hall was clean and set

up nicely. The hall was an addition to the church and provided a dedicated space where individuals could be served food and where fellowship took place. I counted approximately 10 tables of 8 chairs set up. All tables had table clothes and centerpieces. After the ladies departed, the participant and me were the only two persons in the dining hall. The interview began at that time.

The research study included a participant with varying leadership roles in the church from deaconesses to feeding ministry leaders to a youth director. The various participant role provided valuable insights from individuals holding very different positions in the church and who on a normal basis were able to reach a vast number of both churched and unchurched individuals of all ages. This ensured transferability because there were numerous repeated word patterns identified from the participants' transcripts such as "meet the unchurched where they are, outside the walls, walk the neighborhood and where are the youth."

My method to ensure confirmability included bracketing. Bracketing allowed me to avoid bias, assumptions and be guided by the data collection. My experiences and worldview did not influence the interpretation of the data. Bracketing provided an awareness window for me to activate a renewed examination of my opinions. Reflexivity was also implemented to ensure trustworthiness of the data collection phase. The reflexivity process compelled me to conduct a self-examination of the data impacted by comparing same to my own experiences while considering participants disclosures during data collection. The data collection process helped me understand the perspectives and viewpoints of each participant.

Results

The results of the study are presented below. I sought to explore how Black churches in West Palm Beach, Florida used their social capital to re-engage the unchurched members as well as engage their community. All six research participants held leadership positions in their respective church and engaged with unchurched individuals and church members. All participants had very unique perspectives based on their lived experiences regarding how the church could foster relationships with the unchurched through its use of its social capital. The six interview questions (Appendix C) helped to answer the following research questions: (RQ1) How are Black churches using social capital to engage the unchurched members; and (RQ2) How do Black churches foster bridging and bonding using social capital in their community?

Although the research sample was limited in the number of participants, much detail was provided to explore the use of the social capital within the churches. There were some responses that overlapped into more than one theme. For example, Interview Question 2—What are some outreach activities that the church could facilitate that would appeal to the unchurched and build trust?—resulted in the suggestion of a door to door campaign in the neighborhood for the purpose of inviting residents to church in addition to trying to get the attention of the kids with the parents' approval overlapped into the themes "*Come as you are*" and "*Understanding community needs*." Themes that emerged during the analysis are supported by direct quotes from research participants in response to the six interview questions. Table 4 illustrates the number of themes that emerged from

the codes, derived from the responses to the interview questions, the number of times

mentioned during the interview and participants who referenced them.

Table 1.

Frequency

Themes	Number of times mentioned during interview in some form	Research Participants who verbalized theme
Community Outreach	34	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6
Come as you are	14	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6
Attracting the Youth	27	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6
Relationship Building w/ Unchurched	20	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6
Understanding Community Needs	27	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6

Categories - Themes

Research participants were asked a series of questions associated with the social

capital activities hosted by the various research sites. Specific patterns surfaced and the

following themes materialized after an initial preliminary line by line coding session.

Furthermore, primary and secondary codes were also identified and reviewed.

Theme 1: Community Outreach Activities

Study participants shared information related to social capital activities hosted or

facilitated by their respective churches that spilled over into the greater community and

impacted unchurched individuals, members and the homeless in a positive way. This

theme in part materialized as a result of participants describing social activities that

impacted the greater community. Each research site had a number of ministries and groups within the church such as: deacons, deaconess, missionary, feeding ministry, community garden, youth choir, new member teachers and community clean up teams. In response to describing the social activities that spill over in the community, one participant noted:

> The community breakfast for sure and the youth choir singing on the second Sunday. Our men's breakfast that we recently started. I think the picnic and the neighborhood cleanup. I get a chance to talk to politicians when I do that. Like that lady I told about Cracker Johnson. She thought I was crazy (laughing). I told her about Cracker Johnson. That's the truth. They think that didn't happen but the guy did loan the City some money. But across the tracks they don't want to acknowledge that. I think the community cleanup is very good because people see you and they want to know if you're getting paid to do that. I have been asked that two or three times and I say 'no, this is a volunteer thing'. (P1)

Participant P2 also shared her perspective by narrating:

> We have the deaconess. We reach out to other people in the community. I myself talk to them and try to encourage them how important it is to come to church and take part in the church. A lot of time I get positive feedback; however, very seldom I get people to come. But that's one of the things we do. At one time we had a community picnic. It was geared up by the church, but it was for everybody in the community whether they were church members or not. And we have had some of the people to come and visit but as far as join the church we haven't had

that, but we build a relationship so to speak. We have the outreach breakfast on

the third Saturday. We have built a pretty good relationship with the people that

come out. Basically, they are the same people all the time. The missionaries

started a movie night on Friday and they go out into the neighborhood and knock

on doors and distribute flyers to market the event in the community. The kids

come and watch movies and are served popcorn [and] . . . hot dogs. The turnout

has been pretty good.

P3 also shared:

We have members that are part of other community organizations that do

activities and they usually invite church members to participate such as the

Links. We also have an Outreach ministry at our church and the whole

purpose of this outreach ministry is to reach literally beyond the walls of

the church to those that live around the church to help them in whatever

way we can. We do that by serving breakfast to the community every

Sunday from 7 to 8 a.m. It's free so anyone can come whether you are

homeless, a local resident, [or] the elderly. We don't ask questions about

who you are. We don't need addresses and social security numbers. It's

just open to whoever needs to come for a free meal and to socialize and to

be with other people. Our target is the homeless when it comes to that

population. But again, we open the doors to everyone.

We have begun a garden project with the people that come for

breakfast. It's called in the Garden with Tabernacle. It's a direct

collaboration between church members, the homeless, the low income,

and people that just want healthier eating—fruits and vegetables and herbs

and things like that. So we are working together as a team to do that. . .

because part of the purpose of the garden is to provide free-fresh

vegetables and produce to the community, to provide an area where people

can come and sit and just meditate and relax, as well as it being an

education center to teach them about healthier eating, healthier food

options and overall health in general.

In a similar fashion, P4 articulated that:

The outreach ministry. That's the one I'm a part of and we serve anywhere

from – it depends on the month like the winter months – anywhere up to

97 people on Sundays every week. Summer months it tends to fluctuate.

Food is delivered to the sick and shut-in about 30 people a week on

Sundays. The church also participates in cleanups every so often but they

get together and clean up the different areas around here. They have

summer programs for the kids. It all depends on the holiday or occasion

that the church does something for the children like back to school

projects.

We have a health ministry. I guess like every quarter we would set

up in the hall of the church different health organizations and it would spill

over to here and it was set up for free help for the community. Everything

was free to find out your blood pressure, or diabetes, or whatever you were

suffering with.

Other participants also shared their perspectives regarding community outreach

activities.

I would say from a nutshell, one of the things I know the church is doing

and they do it very consistent on Thursdays they feed anybody that is in

need of food. And that's every Thursday. They give them a little bit of the

word and also feed the neighborhood or anybody that comes and needs

food. The other thing that is kind of new now that we are trying to do with

our young people is pull in our unchurched young people. We feel if we

pull in the unchurched young folks, we will get the parents. So it's a dual

thing on growing the church. (P5)

We have a food pantry that we have every Thursday. We feed between 80

and 90 and sometimes 100 families at our pantry. I am a member of the

deaconess as well. We go to nursing homes and we give out, for

Thanksgiving and Easter we give out gift cards and flowers for those

people who are in a nursing home setting or if they are in a home setting

we take them by their home as well. The deaconesses on the first Sunday

we do go to our sick and shut in members and give them communion and

give them a word of encouragement as well. I am also in our youth

department and we are all over the place with our youth department. Next

week we are doing three days, calling it a safari. Wednesday we are

actually taking them to the zoo. I also sing in the choir and that definitely
spills over into the community because when you are singing from your
heart and you want them to know about God it spills over into the
congregation and then it can actually go outside. In fact, on Wednesday a
gentleman came in and sat down. He said, 'I just heard you guys singing.'
So you know that was encouraging. He said, 'I just decided to come in.
My car was broken down and I just needed to come in and sat [sic] down
for a while.'

We have bible study every Tuesday night and that gives the church
members encouraging words so we can go out and spread the gospel of
Jesus Christ as well. My husband and I teach our membership class for
individuals who are coming into our church for the first time. We actually
have a class. It's a 10-week course that we give them as well. Every
Sunday at 9 a.m. Even old members if they want to come back and do a
refresher on it. (P6)

Theme 2: "Come as You Are"

This theme derived from RQ2: How do Black churches foster bridging and
bonding using social capital in their community? I sought to understand ways in which
the homogenous church relationships are leveraged in the greater community towards
creating a no-judgement zone that could possibly connect with unchurched individuals
and appeal to them at the same time. The theme was mentioned 12 times during the

interviews. The below section provides direct quotes in support of this theme from the participants.

> A door to door in this four-block area would be a good thing personally. Like we do the cleanup, if we did the same kind of thing for a door to door that might help a lot. Like they go out to Stony Brook or whatever, if they did it right here – there is an apartment building right here, that might bring out some people. Just these two blocks, third and fourth might get more people than we realize. (P1)

P2 shared that "usually at the breakfast we have someone to move about to talk to people concerning God." I probed about the church group's interaction with the breakfast participants for which the participant further narrated:

> Usually we try to have someone move about the dining area to talk with people concerning God because that's what it's all about. And when they come through the line, we say good morning and have a good day. We try to make them feel appreciated. (P2)

P3 also shared her perspective:

> I think we need to open the doors and have a general meeting place where anybody can come and fellowship and socialize. Initially, where there isn't an appeal to join the church or work in the church but just to have dinner to fellowship and to meet each other to learn names and faces. I think once you start to meet people and they feel that you are getting to them as a person, they will be more inclined to come the next time. So the next time

you have something, then you can kind of begin with the ministry and

things like that but we need to know who our neighbors are.

I think we have to meet people where they are without putting all

of your expectations on them. If a person is unchurched or not saved, I

think you have to accept that and you have to first say you are not a bad

person because you are unchurched. As a church, we have to reach out to

those same people, get to know them and find out what their needs are.

P4 shared:

We have like a fourth Sunday casual. Just dress down like come as you are. Just

come. At one time before the center was built, like during the summer or a couple

of Sunders, we would have church in the open space during the summer. Like one

Sunday a year. After the building was built it faded away. I liked that not being in

the walls.

In response to the interview question: How can the unchurched play a role in building

relationships in the community? P4 stated:

I really don't know how to answer that but one of our deacons—he used to be

part of the community, now he is serving on our deacon board. He was homeless.

He just came to church one day and one of the members gave him a bear hug and

he felt, I think, I want to belong to this group of people. For somebody to just hug

me like that and for me to be on the street and regardless of whatever this was, he

just hugged him. He sort of strayed away but he came back and now he is still

with us.

P5 and P6 also shared their viewpoints as presented with the below quotes.

> People don't want you to know their struggles, so it's a matter of when you get
>
> those that come, connect them with somebody that they feel comfortable with,
>
> because that's only going to keep them. We got to get them here and when they
>
> get here we have to accept them. We can't worry about what they look like, what
>
> they smell like. Come as you are. Everybody can wear what you want. (P5)
>
> A lot of people that come to our pantry are not members. They stay in the
>
> community. We offer them a helping hand with food and clothes. We actually do
>
> a monthly sheet for them to find out what's going on in church, what time church
>
> starts and what activities are actually going on without sitting down and forcing
>
> religion on them. So at their given time they can actually come back. We have
>
> seen a couple of them actually come to church on a Sunday morning. (P6)

Theme 3: Attracting the Youth and Parents

This theme was developed when participants shared ideas about what activities would appeal to the unchurched and how the church could facilitate activities that would build trust. Four of the six participants expressed concerns about attracting youths into the church. This theme was discussed 138 times during the interviews and was mentioned by all participants. This theme was expressed more prominently and with urgency in interview questions 1 through 3. P1 stated:

> I am as concerned about this as you are. Because I want to figure out how
>
> to get this Sunday School thang – I learned a lot in Sunday school when I
>
> was a kid. I still got it too. Not the whole city, just these four blocks. If

you go down to 2nd Street there's an apartment building down there. You

may not get but one or two, but you will get those. Like that little girl that

give me such a problem in church. She did the sweetest thing to me

Sunday just broke my spirit. I told her you know I spoke to your dad last

week. She said, 'you did?' I say 'yeah. He told me to watch out for you.' I

say, 'we friends now, right?' She says 'yeah' and then she kissed me on

the cheek.

P2 and P3 stated also noted that:

For some time, we have been going out to Stony Brook an apartment

complex in Riviera Beach knocking on doors and sharing with the people.

There are a lot of kids out there and we want them to learn about God

early on. If we get the kids the parents will follow. The church used to go

to the Twin Lakes Housing Development also. [We are] always trying to

get the attention of the kids and have the parents to ok it. The parents have

to be on board. (P3)

The outreach ministry is trying to identify what those needs are. We have

a church that is two blocks away. We have a community center right here

that is going to become a health center starting in June. You don't have to

have health insurance so when the word spreads you can go there and get

medical for free, that is going to bring a whole different dimension to the

community. There are hundreds of kids within the three blocks of where

we are sitting. But they may not come up here to the church by

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medical for free, that is going to bring a whole different dimension to the

community. There are hundreds of kids within the three blocks of where

we are sitting. But they may not come up here to the church by

themselves. We have to go to them. But to do that you have to put aside

the fact that you may have this fancy job or money and all this kind of

stuff and not look down on people that don't have those things. So that

means you have to literally meet people where they are. That might be in

the street, at their house, on the corner. Part of that is ministry. Part of that

is service, doing what the Lord wants us to do. (P3)

Similarly, P4 and P5 also narrated:

 I know they are trying to reach out to everyone especially the young.

When you come to the church you see them playing ball, or at home or in

the street and we are still trying to reach out and pull them in. We tell the

parents come to Sunday school don't just send the children you come to

and participate. (P4)

About October last year I was asked the question where are our young

people, 'why are there no young kids at this church? I am also the director

of the youth choir. On 4th Sundays, I would have 20 to 25 kids but the rest

of the Sundays there were no kids here. The kids were only coming the 4th

Sunday. I said to the officers of the church if you are still doing Sunday

School the way you did it back when I was here, that is why the kids are

not here. So, they said 'oh, ok.' I said 'let me do some research. Let me

go to the White church so I went to Sky Church and I met with them. I

know we do not have the money that Sky Church has. So, I said I met with

them and talked about strategy, what they are doing at a high level –

amazing. I came back and said what can we do on a small scale. So

immediately what I did was pull together a core team of young people

who graduated and were doing nothing in the church. In order to reach

young people, we have to make it exciting and get to their level. It has to

be catchy. It can't be your standard let's go to church – that's not going to

work. (P5)

Theme 4: Relationship Building with the Unchurched

Relationship building was an important aspect of this study and the answers to the

research and interview questions helped to highlight this theme and understand the

significance of both bridging and bonding through social capital as well as the treatment

of non-members when they come to church. The participants articulated ways to express

care and concern as a means to showing "we care" towards the unchurched. Of

importance was that each participant expressed the value of going outside the walls of the

church. This theme is related to how the church reaches out to those who are unchurched,

how visitors are treated and the extent to which the church implements some sort of

follow-up protocol**.** From acknowledging visitors, incorporating technology that

showcased community projects, preaching, to the choir singing all are key to appealing to

visitors in hopes of turning them into members (Banks, 2015). As such, when the

respondents were asked the questions: How can the unchurched play a role in building

relationships in the community? More specifically, P1 stated:

Everybody takes it among themselves to bring some people that do not go to church. I am working on some people like my son, and some young men that I know need that and their kids need to be taught that.

P2 articulated that the missionaries started a movie night on Friday and they go out into the neighborhood and knock on doors and distribute flyers to market the event and let the people know that it's movie night. We have sent out post cards in the 33401 and 33407 areas and we have Sister Kind put it on social media and we have had people to call and say that they saw it on social media and came to visit. We have done numerous things, it's just that, I don't know (sighing) it seems that some people like a big crowd too. And then that we don't have a big enough crowd it seems like. I think I will go over here where there is more people.

P3 offered:

As a church, we have to reach out to those same people, get to know them and find out what their needs are. Why are they unchurched? Is it because they were never brought up in the church to begin with? Is it because something happened to them that drove them out of the church? Is it because there isn't a church near them? Find out what their needs are. I think if you begin to provide the needs for people in return the relationship will build and again you have an opportunity to bring them into the church. It is their option. I don't believe in shoving religion down people's throat. I believe that the Lord speaks to all of us whether we listen to what he tells us that's a whole different story.

P5 shared her detailed perspective regarding the theme of relationship building with the unchurched as narrated below:

> To be honest, I think that is where we are lacking. I think that is the reason the church is not growing. We have missionary groups but are we actually doing mission? P5 questioned if they were doing all they could to bring the unchurched into the church and perhaps walking the neighborhood might be one way to reach them. P5 believes that the focus should be on getting the unchurched into the walls of the church. The focus cannot be on what ne is wearing or the hair or shoes but purely getting them there.

> Through a fundraiser a young lady was befriended. The more people that patronized your booth the more money you made. At the end of the day, this young lady comes here. So, I said 'you have kids' – you got to talk about it. I don't care if you're at the bar, wherever you at. Let me tell you something, I turn on my day job just like I turn on Lane Church. Everywhere you go you got to feel comfortable. I am always looking. There's a kid – 'you go to church?' You at a baseball field, 'you go to church?' Hey, we having some fun down at our church, bring them in. Whatever it takes, you got to throw that hook and hook them. We hooked her. She has four kids and when I tell you they are faithful. They will be here in a minute. We pick them up. She doesn't have a car. We send the van over to pick them up.

When participants were asked about how non-members were treated when visiting their church P2 shared that "visitors are encouraged to sign the visitors' book, they are

acknowledged during service and a letter is sent out thanking the visitors for coming."

On the contrary P4 noted that at her church:

> There is no follow-up protocol at the church and the church used to take names
>
> and addresses and send out letters. Now, visitors are asked to stand to be
>
> acknowledged and they are engaged in the church's ritual of friendship where the
>
> members shake the visitors' hands.

P5 commented that "with the youth church, visitors sign in and provide their name, phone

number and parent's name. Parents must drop the youth off to church. I follow up with

the parent to say thank you and hope they come back again." Additionally, P6 shared the

process that is implemented for new members, she however, stated "I am not certain how

non-members are handled."

Theme 5: Understanding & Meeting Community Needs

This theme was derived from interview questions as participants enthusiastically

spoke about the need to understand what communities and unchurched people need and

recognize that many still look to the faith institution to provide it. Watson and Watson's

(2015) study validated that the church is an institution that addresses social ills in the

community. Understanding the needs of individuals requires listening and activating

several of the variables mentioned in this research study, such as the churches' social

capital. The church, an institutional hub with a multipurpose role can leverage its social

capital for the greater good and improve the quality of life of those in need, potentially

through church attendance, membership and empowerment of individuals and families by

way of relationship building.

In sharing their perspective regarding the theme of understanding and meeting community needs, P1 shared:

There was a young man [who] came with his mother about a month or two ago and he wrote on the guest booklet that we have 'I needed this.' That's all he put, that's all he put. The Pastor doesn't put people out. He has a lot of compassion. I tell him that all the time. More than I do, I say that because he will deal with somebody that I may not take a second look at . . . But I am learning, I am getting there. But everybody deserves a chance. If you just get them in the building, you would be surprised what may happen.

P2 also elaborated:

I had a young man to talk to me. As a matter of fact, he shed tears as he was talking about that. He was talking about his kids and his family. I invited him to come to the church that Sunday. I don't think he came however he did come at a later time. I haven't seen him since but he did open up and discuss his situation with his kids. I can't exactly remember what it was about.

During Thanksgiving and Christmas time we give out food baskets. People come for the baskets and they will call. I remember one time after we had given baskets and I wined up giving the lady a gift card, and then after that you don't see them anymore. The church has spent a lot of money on light bills, water bills. paid rent. They will come when they want something. They see the church as a refuge for paying the balance.

Other participants also shared their views as noted with the below quotes.

> You have to be willing to talk about the stigmas to bring them out in the
>
> open, to use the words that go along with the issue or the stigma. Maybe
>
> they used to be taboo, but you have to be able to say gay, lesbian,
>
> transgender – you have to be able to say domestic violence. You have to
>
> be able to say abuse and call things out for what they are. Because until
>
> you can do that, they will stay in the shadows – they will stay hidden.
>
> People come to us. They have a need for clothes. They have been thrown
>
> out of their house. They have been beaten up. They have just gotten out of
>
> the hospital they come to us for a meal and they ask for clothes, for
>
> hygiene. They have nothing and they want to know are you going to listen.
>
> (P3)
>
> Once a year we have Holy Week. That one week we have 30 minutes of service
>
> and 30 minutes for lunch. That was circulating in the community and maybe can
>
> expand it because at one time we had once a month. It was like a Wednesday, we
>
> had noonday service. I think we still have it. I am not sure. At one time we used to
>
> have the shower van and they would come out. Sometimes the community did not
>
> feel right just going into church but once they took their showers they would
>
> come upstairs and participated. (P4)

P5 shared her approach when speaking to a person for the purpose of recruiting him or

her. P5 also elaborated on the lack of activities that spill over into the community to meet

needs by saying:

> To be honest, I believe we are not growing because we are lacking – we have
> missionary groups but are we actually doing mission? Are we walking the streets?
> Are we getting the unsaved? You can't get unsaved people in the church. You
> need to minister to them and they need a word but to be able to grow your
> ministry you got to go outside the walls and that is where I think we can do a
> better job at, which we are doing today.

Another participant noted that:

> A lot of people come to our pantry and are not members. They stay in the
> community. We offer them a helping hand with food and clothes. We do a
> monthly sheet for them to find out what is going on in church, what time church
> starts and what activities are going on without forcing religion on them. At their
> own given time they can come back. We have seen a couple of them actually
> come to church. (P6)

Summary

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of a case study about the Black church's social capital and its application to the greater community. Much insight was gained into understanding the church's social capital activities in the greater community and how they can be more appealing to the unchurched. There are many opportunities for the church to become even more relevant in meeting the needs of the unchurched, but to do so will necessitate a change in traditional thinking and church processes. Findings revealed that the church members are up to the task of sharing ideas and suggestions about what it takes to grow the membership and connect with the unchurched. Although

only six participants were interviewed, this research study may offer a paradigm shift for church leaders willing to change the traditional way of doing church.

To that end, the social implications are varied from the Black church creating a sustainability platform as it reaches out in ways it never has before and truly allowing its mantra to be "come as you are." Chapter 5 will illustrate the purpose of the research study as well as summarize the key findings of the study in the context of the theoretical framework.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how Black churches in West Palm Beach, Florida used their social capital to re-engage the unchurched members as well as engage their community. A total of six individuals with leadership positions in the church participated in the study. The participants shared their lived experiences on how their respective faith institutions were using social capital in addition to how the church might reconnect with unchurched individuals and the community by way of community outreach activities. This study utilized a case study design to help explore and understand the churches' social capital in the greater community by enlisting three Black churches as research sites. The research was conducted because it was unknown how the Black church was using its social capital to re-engage inactive members and how its social capital was being used to remain connected to the community. In this chapter, I summarize the key findings of the study as presented in Chapter 4. Furthermore, study limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications for positive social change are also discussed.

Key Findings

With this research study, I sought to understand the Black church's multipurpose role in building social capital in the community. As such, the Black church and social capital are two major variables used in this study and are threaded throughout the findings. Research has shown that the Black church has the ability to generate social capital. There were six participants in the study representing three Black churches located

in West Palm Beach, Florida. Data analysis included both deductive and inductive coding

resulting in six themes (see Table 4). The five themes that emerged were: (a) Outreach

Activities (*f*=34); (b) Come as You Are (*f* = 14); (c) Attracting the Youth (*f* = 27); (d)

Relationship Building with the Unchurched (*f* = 20); and (e) Understanding Community

Needs (*f* = 27).

Outreach Activities was the most frequently mentioned theme by study

participants. Each faith institution had at least one, if not several, activities that spilled

over into the community with the participants playing multiple roles in the church.

Participants shared activities offered including but not limited to community garden,

health ministries, and attracting youth. This theme illustrated that events hosted by the

churches are a means to improve their quality of life and to meet homeless people,

unchurched persons, and community residents.

Come as You Are is a theme that many of the participants echoed in terms of

persons did not have to look a certain way or dress a certain way to attend church. This

theme has a biblical connotation. Participants strongly expressed this theme in that way

recognizing that if the community were encouraged to do this then perhaps the

congregations would grow, the leadership would reconnect with the unchurched and

better understand their needs, and perhaps work towards providing the resources needed

to improve their quality of life.

Attracting the Youth was the second most frequently mentioned theme by the

participants and one that was of high concern. Participants consistently mentioned the

need to attract the youth, draw in the parents, and consider how the church might appeal

to this demographic in a different and unique way to pique their interest unlike the traditional ways.

Relationship Building with Unchurched is a theme that resulted from all of the church sites having established internal activities. These activities varied but included acknowledging visitors during church service and inviting the community to events, via flyer distribution. Based on participants' reports it was clear that the relationship building with the unchurched was a responsibility that they all took seriously which was evidenced with participants expressing they went "beyond the walls of the church" to accomplish this goal. Participants expressed the importance of finding out what the needs of the community and unchurched people are and working to address these needs, regardless of the unchurched outward appearances. Participants surmised that once this is done, then perhaps the relationships of goodwill would start to grow.

Understanding Community Needs was a major talking point for many of the participants as it was strongly felt that church leaders needed to meet people where they are—be it on the streets, corners, their homes, or parks—and dialogue with them to better understand what is needed to help improve their quality of life. It was mentioned several times by participants that going door-to-door in communities would be helpful to establish relationships and invite residents to church and other activities as a way to show that "we care."

Interpretation of Findings

The findings resulted from the participants providing answers to the research and interview questions based on their lived experiences. Robert Putnam's (1993) social

capital theory that focused on key dimensions such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit of an organization was used to guide the study (Tanukis, 2013, p. 6). Five themes emerged from the data: (a) outreach activities, (b) attracting the youth, (c) understanding community needs, (d) come as you are, and (e) relationship building with the unchurched. These themes were compared to the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

Outreach Activities

The Black church has been characterized as an institutional hub providing development programs that improve one's quality of life with its dual role of meeting the spiritual and physical needs of communities. The data revealed that each of the participating Black churches offered numerous outreach activities by way of its networks within the churches (see Table 3). Putnam's (1993) work on social capital theory was supported by the results of this study. Findings showed that churches develop social capital through their outreach activities.

Findings from the interviews revealed that the dissemination of information into the surrounding neighborhood and the posting of signs were methods employed to inform the community about activities, such as a back to school drive, neighborhood garden, feeding program and health fairs. The findings of this highlighted that the Black church is effectively using its social capital for outreach activities to offer programs in the areas of health, social justice, and addressing social ills impacting African Americans with the end goal of improving their quality of life.

Come As You Are

Participants expressed their passion about informing the community to come to church as you are when conducting outreach activities, even noting dress down Sundays had been implemented at the research sites. However, the participant shared that such a gesture had not manifested in an increase in membership or visitors. However, a review of the literature highlighted the successful implementation of a monthly "*Come As You Are*" service for millennials and an Hour of Power summer series and how it has resulted in significant growth for the church, Alfred Street, from 2,300 to 7,100 over the past seven years" (Banks, 2015. The creation of flexible service times and days helped to accommodate different working schedules and the needs of the congregation.

Participants did not voice a need to implement new church service times but did believe a personal invitation to residents would serve to show that all are welcome. The participants voiced concerns about the unchurched being stigmatized for being a single mother, or part of the LGBTQ community, or having a criminal record, which may explain the reason for the decline in membership. It is interesting in this study that the churches still made attempts to develop bridging social capital into the greater community, even with these obstacles and difficulties of recruiting the unchurched. Banks (2015) explained how community outreach events are a certain draw to the unchurched. This was echoed by Briggs (2017) where the impact faith has on building social ties in the community that provide a sense of purpose was articulated.

Studies have shown that membership decline in Black churches is connected to the appeal of the leader and their ability to draw in a specific demographic. Banks (2015)

shared that congregations with younger Pastors belonging to the millennials or Gen-Xers have been successful in attracting members in their age group. Additionally, Sobolewska et al. (2015) found that a leaders' political participation was an attraction among ethnic minorities as well. However, the findings of this study did not support the appeal of the leader as a connector to membership decline. The findings showed that the use of social capital to invite the unchurched to 'come as you are' was not entirely effective on its own, but that a broader plan is needed to open the doors of the church and invite the community for the purpose of getting to know them where there is no expectation to join or work in the church. This would be a step towards building broad social trust and bridging social capital.

Attracting Youth and Parents

The results of this study showed one way of attracting young people to attend church is by making church exciting for them. This was shared by P5 and applied at the research site where young people's ideas and suggestions were implemented and proved to appeal to other youth. The results of this study showed that a future health center scheduled to open in January 2020 in the community where the research sites are located would be a stimulant to attracting individuals and families to attend church. The health center would be regarded as an improvement to the community and considered an expression of caring. The research shows that individuals and families have been enticed to attend church based on the preaching, singing and community involvement by a particular church.

Additionally, Banks (2015) shared that some congregations with young pastors have been able to attract millennials and Gen-Xers, thereby growing their congregation. The findings reveal that various recruitment methods, such as a door-to-door knocking campaign where both adults and youth participate, targeted to a specific demographics can work to influence the unchurched to attend church. To that end, Riley (2016) advanced the argument that because of the close-knit ties found within the church, this characteristic makes it appropriate for church members to mobilized and knock on doors in communities. Furthermore, LaLone (2012) articulated the advantage that social capital has on mobilization processes and the contributions that can be made during disaster recovery, specifically the response and recovery aspect. This strategy may be key given the research findings that one reason for the decline in youth attendance is attributed to the family's older cohort passing away and the social and cultural importance of church attendance is no longer passed down.

Relationship Building with the Unchurched

The results of this study showed that building relationships with the unchurched is a vital part of the church's ministry to reach the unchurched and develop broader social capital in the community. Participants believed it was critical to meet the unchurched where they are—in the neighborhood, on the corner, in the streets or within one's own family. The participants shared that going outside of the walls of the church was the first step needed to connect with the unchurched and reconnect with the community. The research positioned the Black church as an institution known to generate high levels of social capital that can be used to the mutual benefit of members in the church and outside

of it in the greater community. This is validated by Watson and Watson's (2015) case study that explained how Brown Baptist Church members were committed to helping members in the church as well as the unchurched by activating human capital and financial resources. Likewise, Agger and Jensen (2015) illustrated the peripheral relationships that materialize with bridging social capital and their ability and resources to help improve quality of life.

A critical takeaway from the interviews was that the Black churches' social capital was centered in simple relationship building. Concern was raised whether the Black church was doing enough and if the church was doing mission work, walking the streets, ministering to the unsaved and relationship building with the unchurched. The research corresponds to this point as it eluded to the church not knowing what is going on in the community without undertaking these actions. This finding was expressed in past studies (Davis & Mayo, 2017). The full expression of the church to engage the unchurched towards building relationships through its networks has yet to be fully realized in this particular case study; however, the data demonstrated how they have been successful towards this end and the challenges they face. As with similar studies, relationship building efforts need to be long-term and sustained over time to be effective. Banks' (2015) study illustrated successful community outreach events that reach community residents and provided opportunities to cultivate relationships on the front in addition to create a pathway towards long-term relationship building by offering service times and days convenient for its population such as "come as you are" Wednesday night service.

Understanding Community Needs

The results of this study showed that the Black church is aware of community

needs as evidenced by the outreach activities that addressed food insecurity, food

desserts, access to healthcare, and back to school supplies to name a few.

Notwithstanding this, the findings shed light on the fact that more should be done by the

Black church to encourage conversations about domestic violence, same sex marriage

and unchurched individuals with criminal records. The research highlighted that the

history of the church has included a dual role addressing social ills and providing

programs that enhanced the quality of life (Brice & Hardy, 2015; Watson & Watson,

2015). Although this dual role continues, the findings of this study suggest that the Black

church should acquaint itself with more modern day needs by going out into the

community beyond the church walls as the findings suggest. This was supported by

Briggs (2017) who shared that one's faith may be key to building social ties and support.

Additionally, Watson and Watson (2015) highlighted the impact of quality of life

enhancements resulting from the church's outreach and social service activities. The

theory suggests that the churches' networks can help to achieve a greater understanding

of community needs by using its social capital networks to engage the community with

the goal of building trust and ascertaining how the church can help improve their quality

of life.

<p align="center">**Limitations of the Study**</p>

The research sites in this study involved three Black churches located in West

Palm Beach, Florida all having existed for 90 years or longer. There were six participants

in the study all holding memberships to one of the three churches. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling which is used widely in qualitative research that necessitates information-rich responses as was the case here. The participants in this study were actively involved in outreach activities that spilled over into the community that reached unchurched and homeless individuals. As it related to the limitations to trustworthiness that arose, first the sample size of the study, which was six, limited the ability to generalize or transfer the results of the study to the broader Black church. The sample size did impact the generalization of the result, however, the size was adequate to allow for patterns, categories and themes to emerge as there were a total of 8 primary and 70 secondary codes.

Another limitation to trustworthiness was my personal bias. To guard against this, I incorporated bracketing and reflexivity. Reflexivity provided a means to examine the data's impact on my worldview and perspective while considering the participant's lived experiences. On the other hand, bracketing provided a mechanism to ensure that my own experiences did not persuade assumptions or bias to show up. I audiotaped each interview and took written notes. At the beginning of each interview, the participant was made aware of the recording. I also reviewed the Informed Consent Form (ICF) with each participant. In addition, member checking was implemented to ensure the accuracy and correctness of the data. This involved each participant receiving an electronic copy of their transcribed responses, which they were asked to review and fill in the blank that stated "approved" or "not approved – changes needed." This worked well as each

participant responded with "approved" except for P1, who passed away before giving his approval.

Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the Black churches' use of its social capital in the greater community towards connecting with the unchurched and re-engaging the community. Five recommendations are advanced based on the five themes that emerged from the data.

Outreach Activities

It is recommended that the churches' social capital networks be activated to ensure a broader distribution of information about outreach activities in every form possible to ensure the intended population receives it. The Black church should continue to provide social programs that help to improve the quality of life for the residents. This recommendation is supported by the findings that going outside of the walls of the church to encounter a diverse population was critical for developing bridging social capital and the kinds of social networks that both support the growth of the church, trust and bonding in the community generally. This corresponds to Hao's (2015) study which indicated that bonding social capital played a positive role in the coal industry, since it helped develop large amounts of social capital generated by the community of coal miners. Also, Agger and Jenson (2015) showed how area-based initiatives improved neighborhoods of need and linked people and institutions via bonding and bridging social capital in a similar manner to what was seen with churches in this study.

Come as You Are

   The church leadership needs to create a consistent message of "come as you are." Study findings overwhelmingly indicated that this language should be a part of the messaging to change the perception of those who feel left out or stigmatized by the traditional church. Incorporating this language from the pulpit to the pews may be the antidote to membership decline and growing all segments of the congregation in a more diverse society. This recommendation corresponds to Banks' (2015) study that highlighted the efforts of church leadership to attract millennials, as they consider service times and days, being relevant while meeting the needs of the community. 'Come as you are' was found to be important in this study too as a way to attract younger members and bridge into the greater community making it particularly important for building membership in the church and supporting the greater community.

Attracting the Youth and Parents

   It is recommended that the church creates a street ministry, made up of both parents and youth to serve as recruiters of other youth, by extending a personal invitation to the entire family to come to church while also sharing information about youth activities that would appeal to the family. Study findings shed light on the fact that the recruitment and design of youth church by youth was implemented successfully. A framework already exists that can be duplicated in other faith institutions in need of youth and parent recruitment. This recommendation corresponds to Davis and Mayo's (2017) which explained the generational gap and the lack of younger generations to carry on with traditional church services and culture. Additionally, Banks (2015) also noted that

there was a lack of a diverse group of recruiters available to draw in the unchurched and the need to reach out to a diverse audience to build the church and support the community.

Relationship Building with the Unchurched

It is also recommended that the Black church implement consistent steps to acknowledge visitors, follow-up with them and invite them to community events. The findings indicated minimal activities being carried out by the church to build relationships beyond a first visit to the church or participation in a church event. Therefore, a layering strategy was suggested that acknowledges the visitor or unchurched persons while in the church, with additional activities in the form of letter writing and phone calls to thank visitors for coming, share upcoming events and invite them to these and other events.

Study findings highlights that more attention is needed to follow-up with visitors and turn them into members by way of church activities such as picnics, health fairs, friends and family day, and back to school events. These are often the first encounters that occur between the congregation and the unchurched and they provide opportunities for the church to show itself as relevant to the community in addition to their level of caring. This corresponds to Davis and Mayo's (2017) study that supports leaders being intentional about relationship building in the church as a key strategy for maintaining a strong church membership and presence in the community. Furthermore, Banks (2015) noted highlighted community outreach as a major component of what draws the unchurched into a church's culture and institutions and convinces them to stay and

participate long-term. Following-up and making recruiting new members a critical part of outreach is imperative for strengthening and sustaining the church over the long haul. These strategies also help the church to develop relationships and bridge capital in the greater community.

Understanding and Meeting Community Needs

Finally, it is recommended that the church be intentional about activities that provide opportunities to engage the unchurched and community. The findings indicated that church leaders should seek to understand how they can help speak to stigmas such as LGBTQ, domestic violence, and illustrate that they care about issues and people in their communities. Davis and Mayo (2017) shared Harian Lovestone's sentiments that the church is unaware of what is going on in the community. Even more, P5 mentioned that the church had missionaries, but was not certain if they were walking the streets. Sobolewska et al.'s (2015) study highlighted that a person's church attendance was related to one's associational life. The authors shed light on the importance for church leaders to build trust and cultivate relationships with the unchurched, community and visitors when attending church. This recommendation corresponds to Banks' (2015) study which illustrated that outreach projects, such as Brothers' Keeper and health screenings, lend themselves to meeting the needs of community. These programs provide opportunities for the unchurched in a manner that helps them deal with sensitive social issues or groups.

Implications for Social Change

This research study provides a great framework for additional research into the Black church's application of its social capital. I found that the social capital continues to be the vehicle to reach the people through outreach activities hosted by the church. The findings of this study fit with Watson and Watson's (2015) study that found the Black church continues to be regarded as an important institution that supports programs/activities carried out to improve the quality of life. Similarly, Hao's (2015) study showed how the coal miners successfully activated their bonding social capital into a social movement resulting in organized unions. In both studies, the impact positive social change can have on individual, family and society/policy levels were elucidated.

I discovered in my study the ability of churches to develop social capital and that it is the core of a strong and robust community. As I consider the strength, depth and breadth of social capital as evidenced in the literature review and in the findings, I submit that the message of "come as you are" is of most important and provides a strategy to activate the churches' social capital to engage the unchurched. The implication for social change is that the Black church might benefit from future studies on the impact of the "come as you are" message and instituting flexibility in its service days and times thereby creating a pathway to connect the unchurched with members. For churches to develop broader social change in their community, in this regard, they must be flexible in how they receive people from different groups and persuasions to both sustain the church and be effective in outreach activities.

The findings of this study also suggest that outreach activities are one of the primary factors that is critical to the unchurched engaging and interacting with the churches' activities that build broader social capital in the community. Outreach activities can be said to be the cornerstone for the church to provide social service programs in the community and in examining how these activities builds social capital. Churches can foment greater social change by expanding their outreach activities as much as possible. Another implication for social change, is the Black church representing the community at the local level to intelligently inform discussions around government budgets, legislation talks, and the deployment of resources that can positively impact those living in poverty. The churches' role in social capital development through community engagement places them at the center of how local communities can engage politicians and other policymakers and also enhance the democratic process.

Conclusion

Putnam's social capital theory was used as the underpinning framework for this study. Black churches in West Palm Beach, Florida are using their social capital in many ways that have made a positive difference in many lives. The networks within the churches are the key drivers to the change needed to advocate for a "come as you are" mantra within the neighborhoods. Churches still weld both bonding and linking ability and should offer this in a more intentional manner because doing so, will again, show care and concern towards all and the church could be regarded as a great value to the community.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Research Questions	Data Collection Tools	Data Points Yielded	Data Source
Q.1 How are Black Churches using social capital to engage the unchurched?	Interview	Describe the social activities in your church that have a spill-over impact into the community	All Participants
		What are some outreach activities that the church could facilitate that would appeal to the unchurched?	
		How can the unchurched play a role in building relationships in the community?	
		How does the church inviting the community to participate in church activities?	
Q.2 How do Black churches foster bridging and bonding using social capital in their community?		How does the church invite the community to participate in church activities?	
	Interview	What is your church's readiness level to engage the unchurch towards their unmet needs?	All Participants
		What are some	

activities the church
could implement
towards building
trust in the community?

What type of
methods are used
to follow up on
church visitors?

Appendix B: Participant Interview Questions

Data Collection Tool

1. Describe the social activities in your church that have a spill over impact into the greater community.

2. What are some outreach activities that the church could facilitate that would appeal to non-members or low attendance members?

3. Describe civic engagement activities in your church that have a spill over affect into the community.

4. How does the church go about inviting the community to participate in church activities?

5. How is the church using its social capital to engage the unchurched and grow its membership?

6. How are the unchurched treated when attending church? Is there a protocol?

Appendix C: Final Frequency Matrix

Final Frequency Table

Appendix F

Theme	Definition	Second Level Coding	Total codes
Community Outreach	Participants mentioned activities churches participate in that spill over into the community.	community breakfast, neighborhood cleanup, walk the neighborhood, picnic, youth choir, Thanksgiving And Christmas baskets, movie night, flyers, bulletin, invitations miss the community, collaborations, free services offered, find out what their needs are, sick and shut in, back to school project, shower van, clothing drive, feed everyone, food pantry, Deaconesses visit sick and shut in, give communion	21
Come as You Are	Participants felt strongly about receiving People as they are in church and out- Side of church without regard to Socio-economic status or back- Ground. No judgement.	Personal invitation to friends and family, meet people where they are, not look down on people, bougy church reputation, dealing with stigmas, being a felon, in the judicial system, domestic Violence, single parent families, LGBT issues, address Stigmas, church traditions, do not by into street Ministry, gay and lesbian, community did not feel right Coming into church, shower van, 4th Sunday come as You are, a deacon was homeless, accept them, get Them here, come as you are, struggles, connecting The unsaved, people in the park come to church.	24
Attracting the Youth	Participants all express urgency around this theme and the need to attract and recruit youth in a non-traditional manner.	youth choir, Twin Lakes housing project, get the atten-tion of the parents, movie night, where do we get the young people, going to Stoney Brook apartment com-Plex, Parents have to be on board, young single mothers, the kids realize that we feed them, tutoring, aftercare, why kids not here, white church, Christ fellowship, strategic with my pick, core team, young people doing nothing, catchy, don't want to spend money, bible study, incentive, get them here, accept them, come as you are, connecting the unsaved, hook the youth, parent drop youth off, miss a kid, pick up the phone and call, fresh church, youth department, oratorical contest, take youth to the zoo, youth participate in congress, beaches	35
Relationship Building w/unchurched	This theme evoked emotion among the participants as the underlying feelings were the church must create ways to connect with the unchurched and community and be con-sistent about it.	Pastor meets them at the door, ushers make it known there are visitors, visitors acknowledged by leader-ship, Pastor shakes hands at the door, no official protocol to follow-up with visitors, when visiting given an opportunity to speak, they are recognized, thank you letters sent to them, building relationship Outside the church, sign-in book, open the doors to a general meeting, fellowship, socialize and have dinner, need to know neighbors, without putting expectation on people, meet people where they are, drove them from the church, collaborations that attract community residents and unchurched, showing visitors love, lending a helping hand, we are not competing for members..	21
Understanding Community Needs	Participants expressed ways Their respective church could Learn what the needs of families And individuals are once a Relationship has started to be Cultivated.	churches' responsibility to help, preconceived feelings about the church, he shed tears and opened up about his situation, he was invited to come to church the following Sunday, going out to Stoney Brook apart-ments, how do we break into that population and Get them here, collaboration and working together	

We are competing to keep our community alive,

I will help you with this if you help me with that,
A couple of felons so you don't know what their
Needs are, the church is the entity that can have
Deep raw conversations with people, LGBT issues,
Domestic violence, single parent families, not look
Down on people, address stigmas, leadership,
Struggles, connecting the unsaved, pick up the   21
Phone and call, open house, are we actually doing
mission