# HUMAN CAPITAL, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND CAREGIVING: BLACK RURAL GRANDMOTHERS AS PRIMARY CAREGIVERS OF THEIR GRANDCHILDREN

A Dissertation

by

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# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities to understand how they learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. By making visible the lived experiences of residents in rural communities, it provides an opportunity to unveil the challenges that are oftentimes masked in these communities. This study also provided a platform for women of color, particularly Black grandmothers residing in rural communities, to speak out. Theories namely, social capital theory, human capital theory, and Black feminist thought were utilized to frame the research.

A basic interpretive qualitative design was utilized to guide the study. The data collection efforts were done through the merging of face to face interviewing, note taking, and observations. There were a total of ten grandmothers who participated in the study. Seven of them were acquired through the Black Church during Family and Friends Day celebrations, and the remaining three participants were referred by individuals who were partaking in the celebrations.

The findings from the study indicated that Black women caring for their grandchildren find it advantageous to be the primary caregiver when the parents can no longer provide adequate care. When taking into account the formal learning experiences, participation in continuing education seemed to be common among the participants when investing in their human capital development. In regards to informal learning, by

participating in worship service, and faith-based learning communities (bible study, Sunday School bible class, and Vacation Bible School), the grandmothers were able to develop and increase their cognitive abilities thereby contributing to their human capital development. Importantly, they utilized the skills they acquired through faith-based literacy learning in the caretaking of their grandchildren.

The findings also suggested that networking was essential to Black women's development especially those living in a rural community. When drawing from the knowledge capital of someone outside of their common social circles, the women were afforded opportunities for upward mobility. The knowledge and skills that they acquired from these networks helped the women obtain services that also contributed to the education, healthcare, and behavior management of the children in their care.

# DEDICATION

To my great-grandmother, Ida Lou Terry, widowed at an early age, she raised her seven children along with my father and his four siblings in a rural community in Virginia during a time when governmental assistance was not offered to many women especially, poor Black women. Nonetheless, through her faith in God, she carried on…

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To say the very least, this research could not have been possible without the participants—the grandmothers who stepped in to assume the role of primary caretaker when the biological parents could no longer care for the children. In addition to this, I

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Finally, to many of the women mentioned in this declaration, I humbly submit, "Thanks for leaving the gate open".

# NOMENCLATURE

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|---|---|
| AE | Adult Education |
| HRD | Human Resource Development |
| HCD | Human Capital Development |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development |
| KC | Kinship Care |
| KFC | Kinship Foster Care |
| FC | Foster Care |
| IRB | Institutional Review Board |
| Ph.D. | Doctor of Philosophy |

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

> "… perhaps even higher than strength and art loom human sympathy and sacrifice as characteristics of Negro womenhood" (DuBois, 1975 as cited in Ruiz, 2008, p. 171).

The U.S. Census (2013) revealed as of 2011 there were 7 million children under the age of 18 who resided in the home of their grandparents. Furthermore, the report indicated 2.7 million of these grandparents served in the role of primary caretaker of their grandchild or grandchildren. Moreover, 63% of these caregivers are grandmothers and 52% are African American. Of the 5.5 million children living with a grandparent householder, 2.6 million were under the age of 6. Drawing from the U.S. Census 2000 data, according to Simmons and Dye (2003) there were 5.8 million grandparents who co-resided with their grandchildren while 2.4 million identified as the primary caretaker. Of the 2.4 million, 50% of the grandparents were between the ages of 39 and 59, while only 31% were ages 60 and above (Simmons & Dye, 2003). There is an assumption that the remaining 19% of grandparent caregivers were below the age of 39. Moreover, the 2000 Census data indicated that 39% of primary caretakers had been serving in this role for five or more years. It is important to note, the terms Black and African American may be used interchangeably.

With respect to race and ethnicity, Black children currently stand as the largest populations of children whose grandparents are their primary caregivers representing 18% of Black children, with 7% Hispanic children following, and White children at only 4% (Baker, Silverstein, and Putney, 2008). Furthermore, at least 1/3 of Black children

residing in the home of a grandparent caregiver live in poverty. Roberts (2002) posited that many times grandparents are the primary caregivers of multiple grandchildren. Paying close attention to regional data, southern states appear to have the largest number of grandparents as primary caregivers at 47.2% while the Northeast had the lowest at 34% (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Region I, 2007; Simmons & Dye, 2000).

Since Black children currently remain as the largest populations of children residing in the home of the grandparents, this study focused primarily on Black grandmothers who serve as the primary caretaker of their grandchildren. Much of the academic scholarship has highlighted primary caretaking among grandparents in urban communities while failing to include grandparents in rural communities. Although a large number of grandparent caregivers reside in urban communities, there is much to be said about those who reside in rural communities. As a result, several scholars have suggested that future research focus on the experiences of Black grandparents who reside in rural communities (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005; Kelley, Whitley, Sipe, & Yorkers, 2000). Answering the call, this study focused specifically on Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren in rural settings.

## Background

Historically, grandparents, and particularly Black grandmothers, would assume the roles as the primary caregivers of their grandchildren as a way to stabilize the family during times of slavery when the family was separated, and periods of migration when the biological parents would move to northern states, namely, Illinois and New York for

economic sustainability (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991; Ruiz, 2008). However, while Ruiz (2008) references bouts of migration that may have influenced the separation of families, she made clear in many instances, prior to the mid-1960s the Black family was still considered highly stabilized according to the characteristics depicting the nuclear family unit. Ruiz lamented, by the 1970s the numbers representing the two-parent Black-headed household began to decline significantly and continued on a downward spiral. Ruiz posited this downward spiral was due largely to the social and structural related issues experienced by many Blacks namely, increased unemployment, incarceration, and urban sprawling. In the wake of this transformation of the Black family, by the 1980s, grandmothers becoming the primary caretakers of their grandchild or grandchildren began to occur (Roberts, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Region IV, 2007). Several factors contributed to this phenomenon of grandmothers raising grandchildren, namely, a parent's addiction to illegal drugs (Burton, 1992; Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991), incarceration (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994), teen pregnancy (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson), or living with AIDS (Joslin & Brouard, 1995). Thomas, Sperry, and Yarbrough (2000) added divorce and other public health problems contributed to grandmothers taking over the traditional "mother" role for their grandchildren. Billing, Ehrle, and Kortenkamp (2002) lamented the death of a parent, parental neglect and abuse, and a parent's inability to assume the responsibilities of taking care of the child contributed to the phenomenon of grandparents becoming the primary caregivers of their

grandchildren. Butts (2005) maintained parent's addiction to illegal drugs seemed to be the primary reason for grandparent headed households.

Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, and Driver (1997) maintained while custodial grandparenting cuts across gender, class, and ethnic lines, females, Blacks, and individuals of low-socio-economic status are twice as likely to become primary caregivers. The research has made apparent that Black women assume the role of primary caregiver in far greater numbers than men of all racial groups. Similarly, grandmothers are usually the first to assume the role, and the aunt is usually the next person in line who assumes the role of primary caregiver (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994). Much of the literature regarding grandparents as primary caregivers focuses on Black grandmothers residing in urban communities (Bullock, 2004; Robinson, Kropf, & Myers, 2000). In an attempt to uncover the experiences of grandmothers in rural communities a description of the demographics of rural communities is provided below.

Several scholars reported there are approximately 56-66 million people who lived in rural areas, and nine million who lived in poverty, taking into account the cost of supporting a family of four (Bull, 1998; Bullock; 2004; Johnson, 1994). Johnson (1994) suggests these numbers could differ by state, as well as how "rural" is defined. Furthermore, Johnson, Bull, and Bullock (2004) reported that at least half the U.S. rural poor are situated in the South. The remaining 25% of rural poor reside in Midwestern states, while less than 15% reside in the Northeastern region of the U.S. Only 10% of rural poor reside in the Western part of the U.S. Among this population, there were 11 million elderly adults residing in rural communities (Bull, 1998). Paying close attention

to race, Bull (1998), and Johnson (1994) discovered that the largest populations of rural poor were Blacks living in the southern regions of the U.S. Research has highlighted that Black women and children in particular, were among the poorest of these rural residents (Bull, 1998; Johnson, 1994; Glascow, Holden, Mclaughlin, & Rowles, 1993). In order to further highlight the realities of many rural communities, results from some studies are presented in subsequent paragraphs.

In an attempt to develop a profile of grandparent caregivers, Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, and Driver (1997) used data from the National Survey of Families and Households from 1992 to 1994. The participants in the Fuller-Thomson et al. study were a subsample of 3,477 participants from a larger sample of 10,008 respondents. During the study, the authors discovered that 10.9% of grandparents admitted to caring for their grandchild for six months or more at some point in time. The results further indicated that at least 44% of the grandmothers began caretaking responsibilities when the grandchild was an infant. Additionally, a little over 70% admitted to becoming their grandchild's primary caretaker before they turned five years old. As part of the study Fuller-Thomson et al. developed a profile of grandparents and contrasted it with a profile of non-caregiving grandparents. Based on the responses from the participants, almost 75% of primary caregivers resided in urban communities (Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997). It could be implied that the remaining 25% of primary caregiving grandparents resided in rural communities. Moreover, when taking into account race, class, and gender, women, Blacks, and low-income persons were disproportionately represented in the findings.

Similarly, Minkler and Fuller-Thomson (2005) conducted a study utilizing data from the U.S. Census 2000 Supplementary/American Community Survey to compare the experiences of Black grandparent caregivers to non-caregiving grandparents. It is worth noting that the U.S. Census 2000 Supplementary/American Community Survey results indicated that 2.4 million grandparents were the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. When compared to non-caregiving grandparents, it was discovered that a little over half a million grandparents ages 45 and over were the primary caretakers of their grandchildren in the year 2000 (Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 2005). To add, the majority of these primary caregivers were Black women who lived in impoverished conditions. Also, 84.8% of these caregivers resided in urban or suburban areas while 15.3% lived in rural communities.

When examining the two studies conducted by Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, and Driver (1997), and Minkler and Fuller-Thomson (2005) respectively, the combined results may suggest at least 25% of all primary caregiving grandparent families lived in rural communities (the remaining 75% lived in urban or suburban areas), and of this 25%, 15% of primary caregiving families were Black (the remaining 10% of this population were of another race). It can be further implied that based on these findings, the majority of primary caregiving grandparents in rural communities are poor and Black women. It is worth noting that overall, the research is lacking well-documented numerical data identifying the number of Black primary caregiving grandparents in rural communities. Since the data representing the populations of primary caregiving grandparents in rural communities is limited, the findings from the two studies

conducted by Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, and Driver and Minkler (1997) and Fuller-Thomson (2005) may be identified as a starting point.

## Statement of the Problem

Unlike many urban locales, rural areas are often perceived to be spaces with modest stress and where the living is quite tranquil. Such lack of stress and tranquility may make it more difficult to recognize the social problems that may exist among inhabitants like Black primary caregiving grandmothers (Kropf & Kolomer, 2004). Families residing in rural communities face such social problems as "poverty, limited resources, geographic isolation, and addiction" (Kropf & Kolomer, p. 71).

Rural communities have started to decay due to the economic downturn experienced within the market place (Bigbee, Musil, & Kenski; Bullock, 2004; Glasgow, Holden, Mclaughlin, & Rowles, 1993). As a result, more and more primary caregiving grandparents in rural communities have become detached in greater numbers from needed social networks when compared to grandparents residing in urban communities (Bigbee, Musil, & Kenski, 2010; Bullock, 2004; Stoller & Lee, 1994). Additionally, trying to locate adequate resources has become a major source of stress for many grandparents residing in these communities. Moreover, it has been reported by several scholars that over time, grandparents raising grandchildren have become a vulnerable population that has been often overlooked in policy and practice (Bullock, 2004; Gibson, 1999, 2002a, 2005), especially Blacks residing in rural communities (Bullock, 2004). The research has made apparent that there are some major challenges faced by families in rural communities, especially Black as they are the largest populations residing in

impoverished rural areas. Yet, there continues to be a scarcity of literature representing the voices of Black rural residents, especially Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren in such communities (Bullock, 2004; Hayslip, & Kaminski, 2005; Kelley, Whitely, Sipe, & Yorkers, 2000; King, Kropf, Perkins, Sessley, Burt, & Lapore, 2009; Letiecq, Bailey, & Porterfield, 2008).

Overall, the minimal research that exists representing the voices of Black grandmothers in rural communities focuses primarily on physical and mental health, while little is known about how they gain knowledge and skills to address the handicapping conditions they face in these communities. Human capital development through education, training, and other learning activities are often absent in discussions about rural caregiving grandmothers. Moreover, even less is known about how these grandmothers use social capital to network and negotiate resources, considering the deprivation that has marked such communities. Based on the current literature, we can see the many challenges that may exist and how more research is warranted that highlights how these women learn to manage the challenges that confront them as primary caregivers to their grandchildren.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities to understand how they learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. A basic qualitative design helped to examine the learning activities and the forms of networking in which they engage and

how the knowledge gained from these experiences contribute to their development as primary providers and caretakers of their grandchildren.

Making visible the lived experiences of residents in rural communities provides an opportunity to unveil the challenges that are oftentimes masked in these communities. This study also provided a platform for women of color, particularly Black grandmothers residing in rural communities, to speak out (Etter-Lewis, 1991). It is important to note as this study made relevant the livelihood of primary caregivers in rural communities, this does not minimize the challenges that exist among Black primary caregiving grandmothers residing in urban or suburban areas.

## Theoretical Frameworks

According to Merriam (2009) the theoretical framework is the "underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame of your study. It is derived from the orientation or stance that you bring to your study" (p. 66). For this study, I utilized social capital theory, human capital theory, and Black feminist thought to frame the study.

### Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory was utilized as a theoretical framework for this study as it allowed for an examination of the bridging, bonding, and linking of networks (Putnam, 2000), as well as information flow (Coleman, 1988), and social networking (Lin, 1999) associated with one's ability to gain access to pockets of information and resources for economic stability and upward mobility. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu coined the concept of social capital. Social capital is the linkage to durable networks, which hold power and can offer the backing or credentialing needed to become affiliated with

selective groups (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1979). For those who have membership, they become immersed in such esteemed knowledge by way of extended and non-extended family members, and other elitist encounters. This information is regarded as common knowledge (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1979). Bourdieu's concept of social capital incorporated systems of power constructed by the privilege class where members of such groups learn to garner materials and other resources in order to advance their personal interests. Although Bourdieu's theory of social capital has been challenged, many scholars have expounded on the definition in order to make relevant the social capital that exists among members of non-elitist groups (Kilpatrick, Field, & Falk, 2003).

Putnam (2000) has made significant contributions to concept of social capital. Social capital can be characterized as behaviors that influence bonding, bridging, and linking for the purpose of gaining access to upward social mobility. Bonding can be identified as relationships that are established among members of homogenous groups. Putnam asserted this form of social capital may be useful for the purposes of reciprocity, and building solidarity among homogenous group members. In more lay terms, there are mutual acts of give and take exchanges or tradeoffs that take place among such group members for collective action. Bridging can be referred to as the relationships that are established with friends, associates, and colleagues as a way to establish systems for networking purposes. Importantly, such interactions can lead to increasing social, economic, and the civic well-being of all participants. As part of the bridging concept, Putnam called attention to the term linking. Linking is necessary for individuals of different social strata to gain access to other individuals who have power, wealth, and

social status as a way of "getting ahead" (Putnam, p. 23). Moreover the term bonding can be referred to as "sociological superglue" (Putnam, p. 23); whereas bridging can be referred to as "sociological WD-40" (Putnam, p. 23).

Colman (1988) described social capital as a public good that can be utilized for upward mobility. More specifically, he referred to the information transacted between family members and among individuals within a community as a form of social capital. Lin (1999) defined social capital as individuals engaging in interactions or networking with the intent to gain some benefit from the engagement. Lin provided four explanations as to why investing in social networks may be beneficial. First, social network attachments allow the opportunity for information to flow between individuals that hold the knowledge to those needing to access pockets of information for upward mobility (Lin). Second, access to social ties can have an influence on the decision making process of those in power by putting in a good word to help those who may be less empowered (Lin). Third, having attachments to social networks instigate forms of social credentialing when attempting to advance into other arenas for social capital building (Lin). Last, the attachment to certain social networks strengthens one's identity among group members (Lin). As noted by several scholars social capital opportunities can lead to upward mobility (Colman, 1988; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000). As a result, social capital in the context of bridging, bonding, and linking; information flow and the attachment to social network and ties were the framework utilized for the study. By utilizing social capital in the context of bridging, bonding, and liking as it relates to information flow, and social networking helped to uncover the learning and development

experiences of Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren in rural communities.

**Human Capital Theory**

According to Becker (2002) human capital "refers to the knowledge, information, ideas, skills, and health of individuals. The economic successes of individuals, and also of whole economies, depends on how extensively and effectively people invest in themselves" (p. 1). There is an assumption, then, that the more individuals invest in education and training; it can augment individual's human capital, lead to economic sustainability, and lead to greater yields for society (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). Similarly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in a 2001 report, defines human capital as a system of lifelong learning, starting from institutions of learning in a childcare setting, to compulsory learning environments, to learning in the workplace, to more informal learning environments like civic association meetings. There are several skills that make up human capital development including, "communication (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), numeracy, intra-personal skills (motivation, self-directed learning, and making sound decisions), and interpersonal skills (teamwork and leadership)" and when the skills are not utilized they have the potential to depreciate (OECD, p. 19). Advocates of human capital theory (Akinyemi & Abiddin, 2013) hold the view that knowledge acquired can be applied at various levels including, individual, family, community, and organization. What they are suggesting is that, when individuals invest in their human capital, the skills they acquire can be applied at the micro and macro levels. Therefore, some develop human capital by

engaging in formal and informal learning activities throughout the life span and the competencies they acquire can be applied at micro and macro levels.

In the literature, Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1985) acknowledge the formal and informal learning components of human capital development; however, they argue that such learning enhances productivity within the workplace and can lead to economic and social development. This argument suggest that human resource development (HRD) professionals take an active role in providing training and other learning activities in order to increase human capital among organizational members. There is an assumption, then, that there is a connection between human capital development and HRD. Moreover, discussions exploring the link between human capital develop and HRD has become more widespread in the HRD literature (Nafukho, Hairston, and Brooks, 2004).

The OECD 2001 report reminds that human capital develops through both formal and informal learning experiences within and outside of the working environment and such undertakings is not homogenous in nature; instead, the acquisition of knowledge is continuous. Hackman (2000) argues that there is a blind spot in the vision of policy makers by placing emphasis on formal learning skill formation without giving equal weight to the competencies acquired in informal learning environments. More importantly, individuals engage in informal learning activities long before they become learners in more formal environments, and the learning is continuous or lifelong. For instance, the adult learning concept has expanded to include training that is acquired in more informal learning environments; therefore, Alfred (2010a) urges policy makers to

think more broadly about adult learning and lifelong learning, and consider the skills that are acquired in more informal spaces like social networks and communities for human capital and social capital development. Importantly, in this study human capital theory was utilized to help identify the training and development activities the grandmothers engaged and the skills they acquired as participants in such programming.

**Black Feminist Thought**

According to Collins (1990) Black feminist thought is a critical race theory used to describe the experiences and ideas shared from the standpoint of Black women. Importantly, the experiences are theorized from the viewpoints of Black women on self, community, and the broader society. Collins acknowledges the multiple platforms that exist when describing the Black women's standpoint as it relates to Black feminist thought. Furthermore, when conceptualizing Black feminist thought there are several characteristics that may be considered (Collins, 1986). First, the concept was established based upon the Black women's experiences. Second, while the standpoints maybe unique, Black women share a commonality of battling inequalities of racism and sexism. That is, Black women came to realize that it is not the "intellect, talent, or humanity" of Whites that support their superior status in society, but mainly the advantages of racism (Collins, 1986, p. 14). Moreover, Black women have been gifted with a unique angle of vision of White privilege that cannot be identified by Black men and White men and women (Collins, 1990), Finally, the characteristics namely, age, class, education, religion, and sexual orientation that helps shape the lives of Black women may influence how they express their viewpoints. What Collins is indicating is that, there is no

monolithic culture of Black women. To help provide a more comprehensive view of Black feminist thought, Collins describes three themes that is, interlocking nature of oppression, self-definition and self-valuation, and Black women's intellectual traditions in subsequent paragraphs.

**Interlocking nature of oppression**. Black women have long been affected by the interlocking systems of race, class, and gender oppression. While researchers may identify one as being more salient than another type, the simultaneity of oppression among Black women continues to pervade Black feminist thought (Brewer, 1999). Collins (1986) maintains that for Black women these systems of oppression cannot be viewed in parts or less important entities. Consequently, when any form of oppression is minimized, Black women continue to be vulnerable to other forms of domination that are equally dehumanizing. The work of Sojourner Truths helps explicate the equally dehumanizing forms of oppression experienced by Black women as she states, 'there is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as before' (Lowenberg & Bogin, as cited in Collins, 1986, p. 19). Although many scholars seem to prioritize oppression, Black feminist thought unifies the interlocking systems that places black women in subordinate spaces by making such dominate forces the object of study. As a result, Black women's awareness of the simultaneity of oppression has propelled them to challenge these dominate forces through self-definition.

**Self-definition and self-valuation**. Through self-definition Black women become more empowered (Collins, 1986). For Black women, self-definition is a

personally constructed point of view that challenges the socially constructed ideas and images of Black womanhood. Such images are used as oppressive forces to control, dehumanize, and to exploit Black women (Collins). When Black women create their personal narratives of Black womanhood, they are better able to challenge the images imposed by society, and the more they learn to navigate the oppressive forces, there is less internalization of acceptance of such images (Ward, 1995). Through self-valuation Black women learn to counter the socially constructed images, "by replacing externally derived images with authentic Black female images" (Collins, p. 17) and are better able to articulate their standpoint through intellectual traditions.

**Black women's intellectual traditions**. When defining Black feminist thought more broadly, Collins (1990) calls attention to Black women's intellectual traditions or their learning and how such training and development has enabled them to articulate their standpoint. She reported, African American women not commonly certified as

> intellectuals by academic institutions have long functioned as intellectuals by representing the interests of Black women as a group and fostering Black feminist thought. The ideas we share with one another as mothers in extended families, as other mothers in Black communities, as members of Black churches and as teachers to the Black community's children have formed one pivotal area where Black women have hammered out Black women's standpoint. Musicians, vocalists, poets, writers, and other artists constitute another group of Black women intellectuals who have aimed to interpret Black women's experiences. (Collins, 1990, p. 15)

Throughout history the informal or nontraditional learning experiences was not widely publicized or there was disbelief that the intellectual traditions ever existed. Through its rich history, Black feminist thought helps to reclaim the intellectual traditions of Black women.

For this study, Black feminist thought helped to frame the questions that provided insight into the lived experiences of primary caregiving grandmothers, and how they perceived their realities as they have multiple memberships in oppressed groups—Black, women, and for some the possibility of age, and poverty. As Black women have been reputed as being creators of knowledge, the Black feminist framework helped to examine the formal and informal learning among Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities for survival. Black feminist thought also helped to explore the human capital and social capital development from the viewpoint of Black primary caregiving grandmothers and how networking and learning were applied in the caretaking of the grandchildren in their care.

## Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities to understand how they learned to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. Here, there is an assumption that systems are inequitable. However, Yosso (2005) maintained that many institutions are not designed with people of color in mind like Black grandmothers caring for their grandchildren. Importantly, Yosso referred to such inequities as institutionalized racism.

Therefore, it is important to understand how the grandmothers navigate inequitable systems in order to acquire resources for themselves and for the grandchildren in their care. Given the current state of rural communities, it is important to capture the stories, experiences, and perceptions of those residents who may have membership in marginalized groups like Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. As such, the following questions guided the research:

*Research question 1*: How do Black primary caregiving grandmothers residing in rural communities develop human capital?

*Research question 2*: How do social networks contribute to the learning and development of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities?

*Research question 3*: How do caregiving grandmothers utilize the knowledge and skills acquired through human and social capital in the caretaking of their grandchildren?

## Definition of Terms

Several terms are used throughout this study. As a result, the following terms along with working definitions have been delineated:

*Formal Learning:* Learning that is regulated by an institution or some agency that leads to credit acquisition or credentialing (Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2010).

*Grandparent Primary Caregivers:* Grandparents who are primarily responsible for the caretaking of their co-resident grandchildren younger than 18 years of age (Simmons & Dye, 2003).

*Informal Learning:* Learning that is unregulated and is usually individually pursued. This form of learning is pursued for knowledge acquisition and without the expectation of earning some form of credits (Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2010).

*Kinship Care or Private Care:* Children who reside in the home of family members without governmental involvement or financial support when the biological parents are unable to care for them (Roberts, 2002).

*Rural:* Any incorporated place or CDP (Census Designated Place) with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants that is located outside of an UA (Urbanized Area) (U.S. Census, 2012).

*Urban:* A continuously built-up area with a population of 50,000 or more. It comprises one or more places—central place(s)—and the adjacent densely settled area—urban fringe—consisting of other places and nonplace territory (U.S. Census, 2012).

## Significance of the Study

Both the fields of Adult Education and Human Resource Development make relevant the learning experiences of women (Albertini, 2009; Nanton, 2009). More importantly, both fields recognize the importance of social capital building for women's development (Albertini, 2009; Nanton, 2009; Wang, 2009). Paying closer attention to adult education, and its breadth, the field seeks to raise awareness of the equity issues existing among women, and particularly among women of color as it recognizes the utility of social capital for women's learning and development (Alfred, 2009). As a result, this study stands to make significant contributions to both the fields of Adult

Education and Human Resource Development, as well as Higher Education in the areas of research, practice, and policy.

**Significance in Research**

As stated previously, overall, there is a paucity of research that calls attention to the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers. While there are some studies that recognize the experiences of this populace of women, again, more laboring in the field is needed. To add, the majority of the researchers describing the experiences of Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren are usually situated in an urban context. The points of view of Black primary caregiving grandmothers residing in rural communities are nearly non-existent within the literature. Several scholars have pointed out because of the problems existing within rural communities, namely, high rates of poverty, social isolation, limited access to resources, and the large disconnection from social networks are easily masked, it becomes difficult to call attention to the challenges existing among Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchild or grandchildren (Kropf & Kolomer, 2004; Robinson, Kropf, & Myers, 2000; Schoenberg & Coward, 1997). To this end, this study will contribute to the literature by bringing to the forefront the experiences of Black women who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren in rural communities and how they develop and use human capital and social capital. More specifically, it highlights the ways in which they learned to leverage resources for their development and the development of the children in their care given the unique challenges existing within such communities.

## Significance in Practice

As noted earlier, there are different avenues for human capital development, which can include formal and informal learning. Formal learning can be identified as learning that is oftentimes regulated under such systems as a college or university or an organization where credentialing is awarded (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Conversely, informal learning is an unregulated source for individuals to pursue learning opportunities where there is no credentialing (Merriam & Caffarella). This type of learning is often referred to as incidental or unplanned. This study can inform the fields of Adult Education and Higher Education as to how Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities access and engage in learning opportunities and the programs they find most valuable to them. Moreover, this study can inform educators on programs and activities that would be helpful to meeting the needs of this population of caregivers.

## Significance in Policy

Several scholars have made it known that Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren, especially in rural communities have become a vulnerable population and are oftentimes overlooked in policy (Bullock, 2004; Gibson, 2005, 2002, 1999). Other scholars have called attention to the policies that have been put in place that deny informal kinship care providers, like many Black primary caregiving grandmothers, and access to needed resources in order to provide adequately for the children in their care (Letiecq, Bailey, & Porterfield, 2008). This phenomenon of Black grandmothers serving in the role of primary caregiver continues to develop at a rapid

pace. As a result, this study will serve to inform policy makers of the needs of these caretakers especially those residing in their communities. Oftentimes political officials make decisions with a more urbanized mindset for rural residents without taking into account the unique needs that exist in rural communities (Bull, 1998). As a result, this study will help to inform policy makers of the unique challenges that exist among these residents and to make it a priority on the political agenda in order to help aid in the development of the grandmother as well as the children in their care.

Also, by studying the experiences of Black grandmothers in rural communities, this research sought to give voice to women and particularly Black women who share their realities of their multiple memberships in oppressed groups—Black, women, impoverished, and sometimes elderly.

## Delimitations of the Study

According to Calabrese (2006) it is important for the researcher to make known the self-selected limitations or boundaries of his or her research. Based on this information, the delimitations of this study have been outlined. First, the study was made specific to the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers residing in rural communities. Second, a purposive sampling technique was employed as a way to select specific participants for the study (Merriam, 2009). Third, by utilizing a qualitative approach to research, the findings are not generalizable. Instead, the findings may be transferrable as the sample population consisted of ten participants. However, the study made significant contributions to the scholarship since studies conducted with Black primary caregiving grandmothers residing in rural communities are almost nonexistent.

## Dissertation Format

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities to understand how they learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. For the sake of the reader, the dissertation was written using the conventional format. A description of the format has been provided.

In Chapter I, I provided background information in order to help build the case for the topic to be explored. In building the case for the study, a statement of the problem was developed along with the purpose of the study. Chapter II began with an overview of the historical and legal context of kinship care which includes the case of *Miller v. Youakim* (1979), the dimensions of kinship care in the context of the Black family, Kinship Care Legislation, and the development of Kinship Navigator Programs. Next, through research and literature, I presented a case for Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren in rural communities by making relevant the social and political issues existing in such communities. Finally, I offer research exploring the theories of human capital development, social capital, and Black feminist thought. According to Crotty (2003), the methodology is "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (p. 3). For this study, the methodology section was outlined in the following sequence, (a) methodological framework, (b) role and positionality of the researcher, (c) research process and design,

(d) data collection, (e) data analysis, and (f) trustworthiness. In Chapter IV, I discussed the findings representing the voices of Black grandmothers raising their grandchildren in rural communities. The chapter began with a description of the two counties selected for data collection purposes followed by a rich description representing the life of each of the grandmothers and the children in their care. Next, I presented an account of their education and training experiences and how they were able to transfer the learning to the children in their care. In continuation, I explained how social capital and networking contributed to their learning and caregiving concluded this chapter of the study. Chapter V included a summary, discussion of findings, implications for research, policy, and practice, recommendations for future directions of research, and conclusion.

# CHAPTER II

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities to understand how they learned to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. In order to adequately examine the learning among Black primary caregiving grandmothers for human and social capital building, an integrative literature review was conducted. The chapter begins with an overview of the historical and legal context of kinship care which included the case of *Miller v. Youakim* (1979), the dimensions of kinship care in the context of the Black family, Kinship Care Legislation, and the development of Kinship Navigator Programs. Next, I present a case for Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren in rural communities by making relevant the social and political issues existing in such communities. Finally, I offer research exploring the theories of human capital development, social capital, and Black feminist thought.

## Historical and Legal Context of Kinship Care

According to the U.S. Supreme Court (2011), as a subcomponent of the Social Security Act of 1935, the Foster Care (FC) program was put into law in the early 1960s. The passing of this legislation meant foster children who qualified for Assistance for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) could also receive additional assistance that FC services offered. It is noteworthy that since the passing of the 1996 welfare reform

legislation or Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), Assistance for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was replaced with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (Corbette, 2003). Furthermore, AFDC and FC extended beyond servicing children residing in a foster home or institutions to include those children living in the home of relatives (U.S. Supreme Court, 2011). The author called attention to the disconnection in the rhetoric which raised questions about who was qualified for AFDC or AFDC and FC support. It was also noted that the Social Security Act explaining the conditions of the AFDC and FC benefits which implied that children residing in a foster home could receive full services if the home met the licensing qualifications.

To add, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare interpreted the law quite differently, insisting that all children residing in foster care or with relatives could receive the full benefits of child welfare which included AFDC and FC. Furthermore, the state of Illinois had a different interpretation which suggested that the money purse supplying funding for child welfare services be divided into two sources of giving. For children placed in foster care, they were eligible for benefits supplied through AFDC and FC programs because they were unrelated to the caregiver. Conversely, for those children living with relatives, the purse strings were tightened as they received only the benefits that would come from AFDC because they were related to the caregiver. In challenging the state of Illinois' decision to provide those children in foster care with AFDC and FC benefits and those residing in the home of a relative with AFDC benefits alone, it brought about a high profile case in 1979, *Miller v. Youakim*.

**The Miller v. Youakim Case of 1979**

In 1969 four children in Illinois were placed in foster care as a result of their mother having been declared unfit (U.S. Supreme Court, 2011). Further, as wards of the state, the children were receiving both AFDC and FC benefits. As time progressed, two of the four children were placed in the care of their older sister and her husband—Mr. and Mrs. Youakim. When the Youakims became the children's primary caregivers, they worked to have their home meet state approval, which certified that their residence was suitable for the children based on child welfare policies (U.S. Supreme Court, 2011). The more involved the Youakims became, the less involved the state became. Moreover, when the Youakims became the primary caregivers of the children, the children began to receive less money. When identified as wards of the state, the children received AFDC and FC benefits; however, when they began to reside in the home of the Youakims', they only received AFDC payments (U.S. Supreme Court, 2011). The U.S. Supreme Court noted when making a comparison, the AFDC and FC payments the children were receiving almost doubled the payout of the modest benefits that AFDC provided which was $105 and $63 respectively. Furthermore, the scarcity of the monies hindered the Youakims' ability to take care of the children properly, thereby, forcing them to deny kinship care to the remaining two children. In response to the insufficient payments, in 1973, the Youakims filed a class action suit "challenging Illinois' distinction between related and unrelated foster parents as violative of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment" (U.S. Supreme Court, 2011, p. 3). The case was argued in 1978. By 1979, it was decided that children residing in related and unrelated foster

homes were eligible to receive both AFDC and FC benefits. This landmark decision cleared the path for related cases to be brought before a judge.

U.S. Supreme Court (2011) maintained that, overtime, other families in other states seemed to come forward filing class action suits surrounding the issue of AFDC and FC payments for children residing in relative and non-relative foster care. While the cases were not as publicized as the *Miller v. Youakim* (1979) case, they were still made relevant and provided a platform for others to seek assistance. These cases included but are not limited to: *Jones v. Davies* (1978) in Oregon; *Alston v. Department of Health and Social Services* (1976) in Wisconsin, Circuit Court; *Thompson v. Department of Health and Social Services* (1976) in Wisconsin, Circuit Court; *Taylor v. Dumpson* (1974) in New York state; and *Clampett v. Madigan* (1976) in U.S. Supreme Court. In each of these cases, which somewhat mirrored the *Miller v. Youakim* (1979) case, the U.S. Supreme Court decision was made in favor of the appellees which allowed AFDC and FC payments to not only extend to children in nonrelative foster care, but to relative foster care as well. Although these cases have signaled advancements among kinship caregivers with regard to support, relevant issues continue to exist among this population. For the sake of the reader, the dimensions of care provided for children when their parents can no longer provide care are discussed. Importantly, the dimensions of care as it relates to the Black family are highlighted.

## The Dimensions of Care and the Context of the Black Family

According to Roberts (2002), private care or kinship care, kinship foster care, and foster care are the types of arrangements established by policy makers that describe

the level of care that may be provided to children when their biological parents can no longer provide care. The dimensions of care and the implications for the Black family, especially children living with a grandparent householder, are outlined in subsequent paragraphs.

**Kinship Care**

The first dimension of care is known as kinship or private care which means that children reside in the home of family members without the involvement of governmental entities or the juvenile court system (Child Welfare Information Gateway (CWIG), 2010). Furthermore, when children are placed in informal or kinship care, the parents continue to have legal guardianship and reserve the right to reclaim the children at any time. Moreover, while kinship care arrangements may offer stability for the child, the parents can utilize the arrangement as a way to enter and exit the child's life at their discretion.

Dating as far back as the ending of World War II (WWII), Black children were denied the privileges that child welfare services could offer orphans of other races and ethnicities (Roberts, 2002). To add, Black children in particular, were turned away from many orphanages, and for those institutions designed for children of color, the services were of understatedly poor quality and terribly overcrowded. Policies surrounding child welfare that denied Black children access to the benefits of the foster care system, along with the deplorable conditions of those institutions that accepted Black children have contributed to the prevalence of kinship care among Black families.

Child welfare advocates (Needell, Brookhart, & Lee, 2003) hold the view that there is an overrepresentation of Black children in the welfare system, and emphasized three main factors that contributed to this disparity including, disproportionality of need, discriminatory practices imposed by the child welfare system, and societal discrimination. Like Needell, Brookhart, and Lee, Roberts (2002) also agreed that Black children are overrepresented in the foster care system and that kinship care arrangements were best suited for this particular population. Proponents of kinship care indicate that there are benefits to families when children are placed in informal or kinship care including, increasing youth's identity development, helping to maintain relationships with family members, and preserving family traditions (Butts, 2005; Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2009).

Paying close attention to the preservation of family traditions, Boykin (1983) identified nine characteristics that are significant to African American culture. These cultural characteristics are spirituality, harmony, verve, movement, oral tradition, affect, expressive individualism, social time perspective, and communalism. According to Butts, when Black children are placed in kinship care, they are likely to maintain such cultural characteristics. Grandmothers as kinship care providers to their grandchildren have been described as a major strength and a resource for Black families (Gibson, 2005).

**Kinship Foster Care**

Kinship foster care is the second dimension of care identified. It was important to note, that, this dimension of care is broad in context and may vary from state to state

(CWIG, 2010). When children are placed in kinship foster care (Roberts, 2002), or what some may refer to as voluntary kinship care (CWIG), the children are placed in the care of a relative while under the guidance of the child welfare system. CWIG outlined some reasons why children may be placed in voluntary kinship care. They are as follows:

- Child welfare workers find signs of abuse or neglect by the parents, but the evidence is not serious enough to take the children into State legal custody; instead, the caseworkers, parents, and kin work out a voluntary kinship care arrangement where the children move in with the kin.
- Under the guidance of child welfare workers, parents voluntarily place their children with relatives while they (the parents) receive treatment for substance abuse or mental illness. (CWIG, p. 3)

According to Roberts, what often begins as children being cared for by a relative leads to child welfare involvement, and many times, caregivers lose much of their autonomy in the caretaking process. This assertion suggests that, the more money provided by the state, the more involved the state becomes in managing the household of the primary caregiver. Some Black grandmothers who are kinship care providers are opposed to governmental involvement making kinship foster care a difficult choice for the grandchildren in their care (Butts, 2005).

**Foster Care**

The third dimension is foster care. Here, the child becomes a ward of the state. While this means more financial support than kinship foster care, it also means the state makes decisions about the child without the consent of the foster parent, and in this case, the primary caregiver (Roberts, 2002). Besides this, Roberts maintained these decisions

made excluding the voices of primary caregivers stem from deficit thinking resting with social workers. According to Garcia and Guerra (2004) when individuals assert deficit thinking, many times, their decision making processes fails to take into account the masked cultural or class differences which affect individuals primarily those from minority populations. Instead, in many cases, their decisions are influenced by artifacts, behaviors, sociocultural, or policies (Garcia & Guerra). Consequently, the decisions made by social workers regarding families are based on the constructs of the nucleus family consisting of mother, father, and children, and Black families can be structured quite differently. Indeed, Black grandmothers parent their grandchildren to help meet the basic needs, navigate sociopolitical situations, and preserve cultural traditions significant to African American families. Moreover, the strength and durability of Black kinship care has been devalued by many social workers for centuries; therefore, causing them to make decisions influenced by policy without taking into account the cultural contributions of Black grandmothers who are primary caregivers (Bryson & Lawrence-Webb, 2001). In time, kinship care had sparked the interests of policymakers, and by 1997, it had made its way onto the political agenda and then legislation.

## The Passage of Kinship Care Legislation

According to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (2009), policy makers within the state of Texas began to see the value of kinship care placement and began to create legislation to help support various program initiatives. For instance, in 1997, the state of Texas instituted its first kinship care program known as the Comprehensive Relative Enhancement Support and Training Project (CREST) in Bexar

County. The CREST initiative was designed to offer financial assistance to kinship caregivers. In the early years, The CREST project was funded through a federal grant, and as time progressed other entities began providing funding to support the organization's efforts (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services). To add, in an effort to expand kinship care programming, the 78th Texas Legislature passed a bill, in 2003, which would extend kinship care support services to four counties within its southern region. Such programming was known as Supporting and Educating Relatives as Placements or SERAPE. Furthermore, in the wake of 2005, the 79th legislature approved the implementation of the Family Focus Initiative that would allow kinship care support to be offered to families throughout the state of Texas. Moreover, while the program was developed with good intentions, there were regulations developed that would call for families to meet more stringent requirements in order to receive services. Child Welfare Legislation Policy Network (CWLPN, 2013) provided an overview of states that enacted legislation between 2007 and 2012 that would increase the services offered to caregivers like grandparents raising their grandchildren. The types of support included: "easing licensure requirements, waivers and variances; expanded definition of relative placement preferences; school enrollment and medical consent; payment, reimbursement, subsidies; supporting relative adoption; studies, commissions and task forces; and, miscellaneous" (CWLPN, p. 1). A chart was provided highlighting the name of the state that enacted legislation, the various types of support offered by each state, the provisions of the enactment, and the year the enactment was established. Paying close attention to the state of Texas, the enactment of 2009 gave priority to relatives, and

by doing so, the Department of Family and Protective Services was required to consider such placement as a first option for children. Furthermore, if relatives were not given priority, the decision to place children in alternative arrangements would be called into question.

According to Dressel and Barnhill (1994), grandparents are the first to inherit their grandchildren when parents can no longer provide care. When developing legislation applicable to primary caretakers, the Texas legislature grouped all caregivers under the heading of *relative care*, and by doing so, it minimized the contributions and unique needs of grandparents serving as primary caregiver of their grandchildren. CWLPN (2013) identified states namely, California, Colorado, Indiana, Nevada, Louisiana, Arkansas, Hawaii, and Massachusetts that established legislation specific to grandparent caregivers. Instead, the state of Texas focused primarily on the financial assistance offered to the caregiver. Even more, while many states established laws centering on licensing, school enrollment and medical consent, payments and subsidies, and special task forces for caregivers, Texas lawmakers failed to establish legislation that focused on these areas (CWLPN). More importantly, while the report indicates that policy makers across the U.S. established laws in the best interest of kinship or relative caregivers and grandparents, the laws continue to reflect blanketed regulations for individuals residing in both urban and rural locations while failing to acknowledge the differences that may exist between the two communities. Furthermore, apart from the legislation established within the state of Texas, other states established laws and

initiatives that would offer support for caregivers through what can be identified as Kinship Navigator Programs.

**Kinship Navigator Programs**

Paying close attention to the state of Washington, legislators passed a bill that would allow primary caregivers to be provided support through Kinship Navigator Programs. The passing of the Kinship Care Legislation--SHB-1233 in 2003, required the

> department of Social and Health Services within the state of Washington to develop a kinship search process for children and youth in care or at risk of placement; establish an oversight committee on kinship care; and seek to establish a public/private partnership to implement kinship care navigator projects. (Tri-West Group, 2005, p. 4)

According to the Tri-West Group, each program was headed by a navigator. Some of the duties of the navigator included seeking out areas densely populated with primary caregivers to develop programs within that area; serving as a liaison between the primary caregivers and various resource systems namely, TANF, child welfare, child care, health, legal/judicial, education, collecting demographic data on both the child and primary caregiver, and developing documentation for program evaluation purposes (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008). For example, under the leadership of a navigator, through the collaboration between the Casey Family Programs and Washington State Kinship Overnight Committee, the Kinship Navigator project was first pilot tested in the cities of Seattle and Yakima, Washington, in 2004, to determine its effectiveness (Tri-West Group). Additionally, initial funding was provided by Casey

Family Programs, and subsequently, funding was provided by the state of Washington to support the Kinship Navigator Program. After sixteen months, the program was evaluated (Tri-West Group).

Based on the responses from the participants from both programs, the project appeared to have served the needs of the participants and over 98% of them found the program to be more than satisfactory and deserving of continuation (Grandfamilies State and Policy Resource Center, 2014). Eventually, state lawmakers began to authorize funding to support Kinship Navigator Programs that serviced grandparent caregivers (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008). Furthermore, state policymakers began to expand their support to include programs servicing aging adults that were willing to incorporate kinship care support into their programming. Moreover, these funds were appropriated in 2006 and 2007 with $500,000 and $1 million, respectively. Afterwards, there was a rise in Kinship Care programs across the nation.

**The Rise and Fall of Kinship Care Programs**

The passing of the legislation on Kinship Care programming encouraged states like Connecticut and Kentucky to implement programs (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008). Paying close attention to Connecticut, their Kinship Care Programs required the involvement of not only social services, but service providers for mental health, intellectual disabilities, and alcohol and drug addiction. Likewise, in 2006, $250,000 was appropriated to the state of New York to implement Kinship Care Programs. Moreover, in 2007, the state of Indiana called for the Department of Child Services and nonprofit organizations to form a coalition to begin requesting support for

the development of a Kinship Care Program. Encouraged by the legislation, Child Welfare Information Gateway (2008) reported the state of New Jersey developed a Kinship Care Program for the primary purpose of offering legal services to primary caregivers as a way for them to become knowledgeable about their rights as legal guardians.

While Kinship Care Programs, Kinship Navigator Programs, and subsequent programs were developed with good intentions, funding to support child welfare programs continues to be an issue beckoning much attention (North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACOAC), 2007). Moreover, grandparents residing in rural communities have been hit the hardest in such transformations as they are disconnected from sources of support (Myers, Kropf, & Robinson, 2002).

The misconception of idyllic living in rural communities has made it easy to mask the struggles that exist among its residents, especially Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchild or grandchildren as Black women, and children are among its poorest residents (Kropf & Kolomer, 2004). The preconceived notion about life in rural communities makes it easier for the complexities that exist among its residents to be ignored.

## Complexities of Rural Living

Residents in rural communities face several social problems, namely, high rates of poverty, social isolation, and limited access to resources. It was identified in earlier research that women and children were among the poorest populations in rural communities (Bigbee, Musil, & Kenski, 2010; Korpf & Kolomer, 2004). When

considering placement, grandmothers are usually the first to assume the role of primary caretaker (Gleeson & Seryak, 2010). Importantly, kinship care is the first option for placement when the biological parents can no longer provide adequate care (Nelson, Gibson, & Bauer, 2010). Yet, when grandparents assume the role of caretaker informally and without the involvement of child welfare, there are minimal systematic initiatives in place to assist them or the grandchildren in their care, leaving many in legal and financial predicaments (Letiecq, Bailey, & Porterfield, 2008). For example, when rural residents assume the role of primary caregiver, these grandparents regularly experience issues of inadequate housing, unexpected economic stress, managing the stigmas attached to such caregiving, and handling the gossip that comes with living in such small areas (Bull, 1998). Likewise, Baker, Silverstein, and Putney (2008) posited policies toward grandparents serving as primary caregivers have created barriers, making it difficult for them to access services especially for those providing informal care. Due to the lack of legal documentation, many grandparents caring for their grandchildren informally find it challenging to receive financial benefits for maintenance purposes, to register children for school, and to access healthcare (Landry-Myer, 1999).

Robinson, Kropf, and Myers (2000) conducted a study to examine stress management, feelings of empowerment, behavior management, and resource acquisition among caregivers in two rural communities, who had taken part in the Project Healthy Grandparents intervention program within the state of Georgia. The initiative was designed to empower grandparent caregivers as they become mothers for a second time. As part of the program, the grandparents were provided with legal assistance, health

literacy, psychological support or counseling, and adult education programming (Robinson, Kropf, & Myers). The majority of the grandparents in this study were White and female (68.2%). Only 31.8% of the participants were Black women. Among the participants, there was only one grandfather who was the primary caretaker of his grandchildren. Moreover, the majority of the participants from both communities lived below the poverty line based on government standards and was the primary caretaker of multiple grandchildren.

When examining the grandparents' ability to function as the primary caretaker, it was discovered they failed to report symptoms affecting their mental health. Since the women were not involved in the decision making processes affecting their community, they felt disempowered. While the caregivers were not recognized within the political arena, they did feel a moderate level of control within their families and within their community on a social level. Participants from both groups also reported on the scarceness of resources and support within their communities, and the limited amount of assistance they received from family members to help in the caretaking duties.

Similarly, Bullock (2004) conducted a qualitative study to explore the transition experiences of grandparents when becoming the primary caregiver of their grandchildren. It was important to note, the grandparents were from rural communities. There were 65 women involved in the study. When taking into account the race of the participants, thirty-five identified as Black, twenty of the participants identified as Latina, and the remaining were White. The study revealed that the issues most common among these grandparents were financial stress in, trying to take care of their grandchild

on meager payments, which were less than those offered through the foster care system; inadequate housing accommodations with cramped living quarters, lack of transportation making it difficult for their grandchild to see a physician, and having to negotiate their health to attend to the healthcare of their grandchild due to the lack of adequate financial resources. In the research, Bullock has called attention to the issues existing among Black grandmothers in rural communities as they make the transition from grandmother to primary caregiver of their grandchildren. Many of the grandmothers in the study were not prepared for the unexpected challenges they encountered when transitioning into their new roles as mothers for a second time.

In another study, King, Kropf, Perkins, Sessley, Burt, and Lepore (2009) examined the impact of four Kinship Care Programs in rural communities within the state of Georgia. The researchers explore the challenges grandmothers faced while caring for their grandchildren. There were 30 grandparents who participated in the qualitative study with 97% being female. Over 70% of the participants were Blacks, while only 27% were White. While conducting the research, King et al. discovered that many of the grandmothers expressed concerns about their physical and mental health, as well as the physical and socioemotional well-being of their grandchildren. Importantly, several of them admitted they feared losing their grandchild due to the lack of legal documentation. They also worried about the limited financial, medical, and social support they were able to provide for the grandchildren in their care. These findings support the well documented notion that grandmothers caring for their grandchildren face the challenge of not being able acquire needed services because they have not taken

the steps legally to adopt the children under their care. The study revealed that many of the grandparents were also faced with the challenges of being disconnected from community activities because of their limited sources of income. Moreover, some of the grandparents admitted to giving up their jobs in order to assume the role of primary caretaker while others reported having to apply for public assistance.

Despite the challenges faced, King, Kropf, Perkins, Sessley, Burt, and Lepore (2009) reported almost 90% of the participants were satisfied with the assistance provided by the Kinship Care Program. More specifically, they were pleased with the psychological benefits garnered from the support groups along with the intimate support provided by the case managers. Even with some of the benefits that grandparents in rural communities receive from their participation in various programs, there continues to be major factors affecting accessibility.

**Factors Affecting Accessibility in Rural Communities**

Nelson, Gibson, and Bauer (2010) suggested that initiatives designed to serve such populations as grandmothers in primary caregiver roles often go unsolicited as these populations are either unaware of the programs or lack the knowledge of how to gain access to the services provided. For grandparents residing in rural communities, Bull (1998) outlined four core factors highlighting the difficulties of service accessibility in such communities. They were as follows: geographic isolation, making traveling difficult for both its residents and outsiders; economic deprivation, where many residents earn a very marginalized income; poor human infrastructure, offering limited opportunities for human investment; and economies of scales, local vendors have limited

opportunities to negotiate with outside merchants for the most suitable financial arrangement.

According to Bigbee, Musil, & Kenski (2010), rural communities have started to decay due to the economic downturn experienced within the market place. As a result, more and more primary caregiving grandparents in rural communities have become detached in greater numbers from needed social networks when compared to grandparents residing in urban communities (Bigbee, Musil, & Kenski). Additionally, trying to locate adequate resources has become a major source of stress for many grandparents residing in these communities. It has been reported by several scholars that many grandparents raising grandchildren have become a vulnerable population that is often overlooked in policy and practice (Bullock, 2004; Gibson, 1999, 2002a, 2005), especially Blacks residing in rural communities (Bullock, 2004).

**Politics Affecting Residents in Rural Communities**

According to Bull (1998), at the federal, state, and, local levels of government, the political leadership lacks the knowledge of how to address the unique needs of populations within rural locales. As a result, these officials make the mistake of prescribing blanketed regulations that follow an urban model making it difficult to identify the specific challenges faced by rural residents. Bull recommended that these elected officials partake in adult education programs, such as continuing education as a way to minimize the misplacement of services and resource allocations due largely to their ignorance of the culture of residents in rural communities. Since political leaders appear to be uninformed about the experiences of rural residents (Bull, 1998), several

scholars are beckoning for more laboring in the field to make relevant the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers, especially those residing in rural communities (Ruiz, 2008).

Responding to the call, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities to understand how they learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. More specifically, formal and informal learning for social capital building were explored in order to understand how Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities learn to leverage resources. Alfred (2009) posited it is important that we think more broadly about the concept of learning to include more informal learning that can take place among community members as well as through networking systems instead of steadying our focus on more formalized or traditional learning nestled in institutions or organizations. Other authors side with Alfred, making known the various constructs of adult learning (Marriam, Caffarella, & Baumgrnter, 2007). As a result, forms of formal and informal learning that can take place among adults for human capital development are identified.

## Human Capital Development

The concept of human capital is based on the understanding that some develop such capital by engaging in formal and informal learning activities throughout the lifespan, and the competencies acquired can be applied at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. The importance of education and human capital development has manifested in many studies. For example, Nafukho, Hairston, and Brooks (2004)

explored the origins of human capital chronologically to understand how leading scholars conceptualized the theory. The elements embedded in such notions helped the authors to see more clearly the interconnectedness between human capital theory and HRD. The research conducted by Nafukho, Hairston, and Brooks served as a launching pad to encourage other HRD academicians to continue scholarship that focus on the link between Human Capital Theory and HRD.

In other research, Akinyemi and Abiddin (2013) present various human capital models that explain how education and the creation of human capital can be applied in HRD practices. There is an assumption, then, that an investment in intellectual stock through formal and informal education can increase human productivity and output at the individual and organizational levels, and can lead to advancement and economic sustainability overtime. The argument would suggest that when there is an investment in the human capital of adults, there are benefits to the individual, organization, and the wider society.

When examining the theory of human capital more closely, there is a constant variable, which is, learning, that seems to be pervasive. Several scholars have demonstrated the importance of skill formation within and outside of learning environments that are considered to be credentialing establishments. Since learning extends beyond the classroom, scholars may want to think more broadly about the term, and provide a more comprehensive interpretation that recognizes the utility of both formal and informal learning spaces for training and development. For this study, the application of human capital theory allowed for the exploration of both formal and

informal learning engagements among Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities.

According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) adult education can occur in forms of formal, informal, and nonformal learning. However, the learning, networking, and caregiving that may exist among African American primary caregiving grandmothers will be assessed through two forms of adult education—formal and informal learning. The concepts defining formal and informal learning are delineated.

**Formal Learning**

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) made clear that learning in a formal environment is "highly institutionalized, bureaucratic, curriculum driven, and formally recognized with grades, diplomas, or certificates" (p. 29). Merriam and Caffarella (1999) defined formal learning to include: independent adult education organizations where learning is designed with the adult learner in mind; educational institutions where forms of post-secondary and corporative extension service learning is provided; quasi-educational organizations, where learning is acquired through forms of civic engagement and in the spirit of an allied function; and non-educational organizations, where learning is oftentimes acquired for the purpose of meeting the bottom line within organizations. The authors posited that in the past, formal education was conducted in primary, secondary, and post-secondary school settings with the curriculum crafted to serve individuals that were considered traditional students or under the age of twenty-four (Meriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

However, in more recent times, the formal education environments like colleges, universities, and vocational or technical institutes have experienced a shift in the population that they serve. More and more, these formal education environments are becoming learning grounds for non-traditional students or those adults who are over the age of 25. Along with formal learning spaces, adults also partake in more informal learning arenas.

**Informal Learning**

According to Schugurensky (2000), learning that occurs outside of the formal learning environment is considered informal learning. Heckman (2000) argues that formal education seems to capture the attention of policy makers while informal training and development is being pushed to the margins. There is a dilemma when formal learning is viewed as the single most important source for skill development. While learning in more formal spaces may offer credentialing and organizational advancement, Heckman contends that it is only one aspect of the learning process. He also believes that while the competencies acquired through informal training may be difficult to measure according to governmental standards, it is a lifetime affair, and the learning may be more valuable than the skills acquired in formal learning environments. To demonstrate the value of informal learning, Heckman conducted a study to examine skill acquisition in both formal and informal learning environments. He found that, when learned at an early age and nurtured overtime, informal human capital interventions namely; social skills, self-discipline, and other non-cognitive skills produced by schools, families, and other entities can be important determinants for success. Heckman's study

supported OECD's notion, in a 2001report, suggesting that interpersonal and intrapersonal skills are competencies that make-up informal human capital development. Schugurensky (2000) conceptualizes tenants of informal learning in a typology to include: self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization learning.

**Self-directed learning**. In earlier works, Knowles (1973) identified self-directed learning as a key element of adult learning knowledge and skill acquisition is directed by the learner, and as learners move into adulthood, they become more self-directing in their learning. However, it is important to note while adult learners utilize a more self-directed approach to learning, there is an instructor to offer nurturing within the learning environment. Brookfield (2009) also reminds us that self-directed learning is not a highly individualized affair; instead, adults can move in and out of learning spaces where knowledge is shared among group members while remaining self-directed in their learning. In his work, Schugurensky (2000) provided an example of self-directed learning:

> … a group of neighbors wants to get their street paved, and then set out to learn collectively the different steps that they must take to influence municipal decision-making, reading documents, talking with councilors, meeting with leaders of other neighborhoods, etc. (p. 3)

Here, the example describes the characteristics of self-directed learning presented in the work of Brookfield (2009) suggesting that adults can work within groups while engaging in self-directed learning activities.

**Incidental learning.** Unlike self-directed learning, incidental learning occurs happenstance, where the learning occurs unexpectedly (Schugurensky, 2000). In the reflection process, the individual realizes at some point that some learning or knowledge acquisition has occurred. For example, while engaging in conversation with colleagues an individual may come to know the number of grandparent headed households that may exist within his community. He is taken by surprise. While driving home, he reflects on an earlier conversation with his colleagues, and acknowledges the learning that has taken place.

**Socialization learning.** Socialization learning is tacit learning that occurs through everyday encounters that help to shape our beliefs, values, and skills (Schugurensky, 2000). Moreover, this learning becomes internalized from our encounters, making us unaware of the actual learning experiences. Again, Schugurensky provides an example of socialization learning, "an elementary school teacher has different expectations of male and female students, and treats them differently, and neither the teacher nor the students are aware of the impact of the hidden curriculum in gender role socialization" (p. 5).

Paying closer attention to informal learning, Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) conducted a case study on residents in a rural community in Australia to examine the interactions among community members as a way to understand how certain processes might help build social capital. Focusing primarily on the results of the study, it was discovered that there was a relationship between learning and social capital. Importantly, when examining the interactive processes among such community members, there was

an excessive amount of informal learning taking place. As expressed by the participants, the informal learning that was taking place among community members was unrecognized as they perceived learning mainly in the context of formalized education like the school environment. Falk and Kilpatrick found that for the individuals in this rural setting, informal learning played a significant role in their lives. For example, individuals in the community attended meetings, participated in clubs, made use of the internet for informational purposes, and drew from the intellectual capital within their community for learning purposes. Even idle chatter and gossip were also found to be avenues for informal learning.

As the study conducted by Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) made relevant informal learning, Alfred (2009) confirms that adult learners can maximize social capital resources through formal and informal learning experiences. The investment in both formal and informal learning supports Becker (2002) and a report published by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2001) suggesting that participation in such learning experiences is the basis of human capital development. Therefore, it is important to understand human capital development as its existence can be contingent upon the social networks that may be established.

## Social Capital and Women's Learning

According to Nanton (2009), often women are called upon and expected to meet a myriad of demands and expectations that have been imposed by individuals within a family and those outside of the home. As a result of societal shifts, more and more women have become engaged in both formal and informal adult learning. More

importantly, when transitioning into these new roles as learners, many women become attached to social capital networks in order to help facilitate learning for their development. Furthermore, when women gain access to such networks, they become the beneficiaries of information, knowledge, and resources. Moreover, for women, "membership in these networks, whether they are at the individual level (family and friends) or the societal level (community groups), it is sought with the expectations of reciprocity, mutuality, and benefit for the women involved" (Nanton, 2009, p. 14). More specifically, women engage in such networks with a purpose. While there is an exchange of knowledge and information that occurs among members, there are expected benefits to be garnered during such interactions. For women accessing such networks at the individual level or community level, it is the bonding and bridging respectively, that Putnam (2000) speaks of in the literature.

Bonding refers to the relationships that are established among homogenous group members; whereas, bridging is understood to be those relationships that are established between members of heterogeneous groups for upward mobility. Referring back to Nanton (2009), when women become attached to social networks, they become privy to certain information. Likewise, Coleman (1988) posited that information flow among family members and community members was a way of building social capital. Gaining access to flows of information can transact into upward social mobility, thereby, leading to human capital development for the engaging parties. In more lay terms, when individuals become privy to certain information, they learn the skills and knowledge of

"what it takes" to increase their ability to become a more skilled or informed consumer which can lead to upward mobility.

Furthermore, Coleman particularly called attention to how the flow of information could be beneficial particularly to those individuals of marginalized groups for their learning and social capital building. Based on the findings from a study that was conducted on high school students, Coleman discovered that the effects of social capital and information flow provided the resources that helped to decrease the dropout rate among students, thereby, leading to forms of human capital development. When individuals gain access to pockets of information that leads to knowledge building and skill development the opportunity for self-investment increases affording them the chance to cross over into more affluent arenas. More and more, as families and communities become a source for social capital building it can help to ameliorate some of the hardships often experienced among individuals residing in impoverished communities (Alfred, 2009; Coleman, 1988).

In the research, Yosso (2005) examines such communities of color from a cultural wealth perspective. Importantly, she utilizes Critical Race Theory to challenge the negative stereotypes which are often utilized to describe communities comprised mostly of people of color. By doing so, she focuses on the various forms of capital that can be found in such communities including, "aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital" (p. 69).

Aspirational capital is the ability of one to see beyond their current circumstances, and to dream of future possibilities. The ability to develop

communication skills that can be transferred into other social settings is known as linguistic capital. The term familial capital describes the importance of extended family members like grandparent caregivers. Social capital is the networking and pooling of resources for the well-being of others. Navigational capital is one's ability to maneuver through institutions that fail to serve the interests of people of color. The skills developed in order to challenge the negative stereotypes of people of color can be identified as resistant capital. Moreover, the learning that can benefit marginalized groups speaks to Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren as they can have multiple memberships in oppressed groups, Black, women, poor, and, for some, elderly. More importantly, authors like Coleman and Putnam (2000) recognize the strength of family members and community members for social capital building, making it clear that pertinent information is not solely garnered from those of elitist groupings as Bourdieu and Passerson (1979) might have implied (Kilpatrick, Field, & Falk, 2003).

However, authors like Kilpatrick, Field, and Falk (2003) alerted that some scholars like Raffo and Reeves (2000) view Putnam (2000) and Coleman's (1998) ideologies of social capital as being too communitarian or an exaggerated commitment to social norms that instigates a coming together of family, school, and community. Defending Putnam and Coleman's views, Kilpatrick, Field, and Falk stated that while

> [communitarian] approaches tend to emphasis primordial relationships and ascribed roles—primarily those associated with kinship—social capital theories direct attention towards a diverse variety of different types of relationships, some

> of them relatively loose and informal. These can include friendships, workplace ties, membership in voluntary associations, participation in social movements, involvement in professional communities of practices and everyday neighbourly interaction. (p. 420)

Typically, women who engage in the relations that Kilpatrick and his colleagues speak of help to facilitate learning for their development (Nanton, 2009). Usually, these relationships can be referred to as social networks or social ties.

Lin (1999) recognized the utility of social capital building in the form of social networks and how they have come to aid in the learning and development of women. However, she acknowledged that individuals are not engaging in these networks for sport, they are expecting some return on their investment. Nanton's (2009) ideology somewhat parallels Lin's notion of why individuals invest in social networking. Nanton asserted previously that when women engage in social networks for learning, there is an expectation of benefits, but for both parties involved. Lin recalled some of the benefits of social networks. For example, such networks cause information to flow between individuals who hold the knowledge to those needing to access pockets of information to make informed decisions. Having access to social ties can have an influence on the decision making process of those in power by "putting in a good word" to help those who may be less empowered. Attachments to social networks instigate forms of social credentialing when attempting to advance into other arenas for social capital building. Lin also noted that social networks can strengthen one's identity among group members. While there are some benefits, there are also some noticeable drawbacks to social

capital. Several authors have called attention to the marginalization of social capital building (Portes, 1998; Portes & Landolt, 2000).

**Social Capital and Marginalization**

While social capital can create inclusion, it can also be an exclusionary resource (Portes, 1998; Portes & Landolt, 2000). Alfred (2009) calls attention to the dangers of the contextualizing of social capital as it fails to acknowledge gender and power differences that emerge during networking opportunities for women. Flannery (2000) asserted race, class, and gender identities influence how women gain access to arenas of power and privilege. Unlike middle class women, women who are low-income are not always privy to the social capital influences to land positions in the labor market that promote opportunities where their input is valued, and where opportunities for human capital development exists. Here, it is recognizable how women and, particularly women of marginalized groups, like Black primary caregivers in rural communities, can be affected if they become detached from social networks that can aid in their development and the development of the grandchildren in their care.

As previously noted, the study places the experiences of Black grandmothers who are the primary caretakers of their grandchildren at the nucleus of research as they have membership in marginalized groups—Black, women, for some, elderly, and poor. Therefore, the application of Black feminist thought helped to frame the research exploring how grandmothers learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care.

## Black Feminist Thought

Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1996) maintained that Black women are often negatively impacted by societal issues of racism and sexism and, as a result, they generally live in impoverished conditions. Additionally, Black women are affected by the intra-racial discrimination when individuals receive preferential treatment based on the hue of their Black skin. Therefore, Black feminist thought refers to a body of

> knowledge that expresses the idea that the daily living of Black women has produced a collective consciousness that resists being defined as 'less than,' resists being stereotyped as undesirable, and instead seeks to define and empower its members by interpreting existence as triumph. As a result of this constant awareness of difference, the theoretical writings of Black feminist thought posit that Black women conceptualize their existence as unique and their place as tenuous and uncertain. Therefore, they maintain an oppositional world view. (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, p. 144)

Similarly, Collins (1990) posited that Black feminist thought recognizes Black women as agents of knowledge, while placing their experiences at the nucleus of analysis in the midst of racism, classism, sexism, and ageism to instigate social change. To add, historically, Black women have been forced to become creators of knowledge through self-reliance. Collins further noted, as heads of household, Black women have long held the responsibility of obtaining and communicating knowledge effectively, as they exercise leadership within their households and within their communities, despite the adversities of racism, classism, sexism, and ageism and Black feminist thought views

knowledge as a way to empower individuals who are oppressed. Many scholars (Bryson & Lawrence-Webb, 2001; Harris, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, & Cervero, 1996; Simpson & Lawrence-Webb, 2009) across disciplines have conducted both empirical and non-empirical research employing Black feminist thought to help frame their study.

Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1996) utilized Black feminist thought to explore the education narratives of eight Black women reentering higher education at both the graduate and undergraduate levels to understand how their experiences in the broader society impacted their learning within the academy. Based on the findings, it was discovered that the women often experienced issues centering on power relations of "race, class, and color" (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, p. 142). Moreover, the authors utilized the concept of Black feminist thought to explore the learning among women, and, particularly, Black women.

Ward (1995) utilizes Black feminist thought to examine the experiences of Black female doctoral students studying at predominately White institutions and how they learned to negotiate their environment in order to matriculate through the program. The respondents admitted to utilizing strategies of self-definition (the rejection of socially constructed negative views of Black womanhood)—a construct of Black feminist theory in order to navigate their predominately White environments. Such strategies included: "(a) to gain recognition on the basis of favorable academic performances, (b) to call and draw on familial teachings, (c) to disregard devaluation and objectification as the "Other," (d) to project oneself as an extension of the institution with which they are

affiliated, and (e) to project oneself in the environment as an educated, intelligent Black women" (Ward, p. 220).

Harris (2007) used Black feminist thought as the guiding framework to examine the challenges faced by women of color in academe and how their racial identities are negotiated at a predominately White institution. As a faculty member of color, Harris includes her personal narrative that highlights how her race, gender, and professional identity influenced how she is perceived in the academic environment in an oppressive context. More specifically, Harris discusses the lack of respect White students display by oftentimes failing to address her by her professional title while White faculty members are addressed by their professional title "doctor".

Other authors like Simpson and Lawrence-Webb (2009) utilized the conceptual framework of Black feminist thought to explore the experiences of seven grandmothers in Baltimore County serving as primary caretaker of their grandchildren. The research sought to examine the resource availability and accessibility within their community and how it influenced their ability to provide care for their grandchildren. There were three themes that seemed to be most significant among the women which included: (a) traditional helping resources, (b) inappropriate or unresponsiveness of human services agencies, and (c) limited options and alternatives for grandmothers. For this research, the application of Black feminist thought helped to identify the unique characteristics within Black grandparent headed households.

Since slavery, Black women have been thrust into the role as heads of their households (Burton & Dilworth-Anderson, 1991) along with serving in the capacity as

community mothers, raising not only their children and grandchildren, but children residing in the neighborhood (Collins, 1990; Roberts, 2002). According to Bryson and Lawrence-Webb (2001), the field of social work has not fully embraced the experiences of individuals from marginalized groups or those considered to be the "Other". Furthermore, many practitioners in the field have been accused of utilizing a blanketed Eurocentric worldview while failing to take into account the social context of the life of their clients who typically "live within socially determined and maintained marginalized bounded communities" (Bryson & Lawrence-Webb, p. 11). Therefore, authors like Bryson and Lawrence-Webb utilized Black feminist thought as a foundation for social workers to develop a more comprehensive approach to their intervention practices by incorporating a marginalized perspective that takes into account the historical foundations of the client, the intersection of oppression, and culturally specific survival tactics.

The theoretical writings of Black feminist thought helped to draw attention to experiences that are specific to Black women both within and outside of the academy as a way to "define and empower its members by interpreting existence as a triumph" (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996). As a result, Black feminist thought helped to frame the questions that provided insight into the lived experiences of primary caregiving grandmothers and how they perceive their realities as they have multiple memberships in oppressed groups—Black, women, and for some, the possibility of, age, and poverty.

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities in order to understand how they learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. Social capital and human capital theories were the guiding theoretical frameworks for this study because they allow for an examination of bridging, bonding, and linking (Putnam, 2000); information flow (Coleman, 1988); and social networking and ties (Lin, 1999) associated with one's ability to gain access to pockets of information and resources for upward mobility. Human capital development is one's ability to gain access to pockets of information, or fiscal resources that can lead to knowledge building and skill development for self-investment for upward mobility (Cote, 2001). Black feminist thought (Collins, 1990) was another framework that was utilized in the research. Collins posited that Black feminist thought recognizes Black women as agents of knowledge, while placing their experiences at the nucleus of analysis in the midst of racism, classism, sexism, and ageism to instigate social change. Black feminist thought views knowledge as a way to empower individuals who are oppressed, as Black women have been forced to become creators of knowledge as a means for survival which is often created through self-reliance (Collins, 1990). Furthermore, Black feminist thought recognizes oral tradition and communal structure that exist among Black women.

This study has been promoted by the need to instigate more discourse surrounding issues related to Black grandmothers and more specifically those in rural

communities. Far too often the policies that center on urban residents have been prescribed for rural residents as policy makers fail to recognize the unique needs of those residing in rural communities like Black grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. The inadequate amount of attention given to Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities helps to minimize their relevancy in research, policy, and practice as some of these women have come to know marginalization in multiple groups. As a result, the findings from this basic interpretive qualitative study sought to give voice to Black grandmothers in rural communities as they provided their stories, experiences, and their truths from their perspectives.

# CHAPTER III

# METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities to understand how they learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. Given the current state of rural communities, it was important to capture the stories, experiences, and perceptions of those residents who may have membership in marginalized groups like African American grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. In order to bring attention to the experiences of these caregivers, a basic interpretive qualitative approach was employed.

Crotty (2003) maintained that in order to explore individual experiences, a proficient process is needed. This process can be identified as the methodology element of research. According to Crotty, the methodology element of research is "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (p. 3). For this study, the methodology section will be outlined in the following sequence, (a) methodological framework, (b) role and positionality of the researcher, (c) research process and design, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, and (f) trustworthiness.

## Methodological Framework: Qualitative Research

For this study, a qualitative approach was utilized. According to Merriam (2009), with qualitative research, the researcher identifies a gap in the literature and then formulates a research question or questions as a way to understand a phenomenon while attempting to make a contribution to existing literature. Crotty (2003) maintained, when conducting qualitative research, multiple realities can describe the phenomenon. Here, a union forms between the subject and the object as a way to make meaning of a particular phenomenon. Here, this intent was to become one with participants in a rural context to explore the phenomenon of African American grandmothers raising grandchildren in more recent times. Since there were multiple participants, there was a likelihood that multiple realties or viewpoints would emerge from the informants giving way to a more inductive process, which is one of the strengths of qualitative research (Martens, 2005). As a result, the application of qualitative inquiry was essential as it best supported the probing necessary to explore the phenomenon of African American grandmothers raising grandchildren.

In qualitative research, once the viewpoints are garnered, Miles and Huberman (1994) asserted the researcher then integrates the interpreted information which is then transformed into a narrative that seems more substantial than numerical data. As such, this qualitative design helped to capture the learning experiences of African American grandmothers raising grandchildren in rural communities that may otherwise be difficult to interpret when relying solely on numerical reporting. Moreover, since there is a

scarcity of literature representing this population of women, the empirical evidence helped to make known their truths in the larger bodies of literature.

When examining the variety of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identify with eight strands of research including case study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, life history, historical, action and applied research, and clinical research. Cresswell (1998) recognizes only five strands of qualitative research, namely, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, phenomenology, and basic qualitative. Merriam and Associates (2002) identifies with eight areas of research, that is, basic interpretive qualitative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, ethnographic study, narrative analysis, critical qualitative research, and postmodern research. For this study, a basic interpretive qualitative approach was employed in order to bring to light the learning experiences among African American primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities.

**Types of Qualitative Designs**

In ethnographic research, the investigator examines a culture, a group, or a social system in order to understand the interactions of the collective (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990) and not just individual experiences (Merriam & Associates, 2002) characterized by basic interpretive qualitative research. Unlike basic interpretive qualitative inquiry where the theory is established, Corbin and Strauss (2008) asserted in grounded theory research, the theory is emergent. Here, there is a noticeable difference between basic interpretive qualitative inquiry and grounded theory as the latter inquiry's characteristics extend beyond seeking understanding (Merriam & Associates, 2002) to include theory

building. In the case of phenomenological research, the researcher examines the essence of the experience such that bracketing is necessary for both the researcher and the participant to avoid contaminating the data (Patton, 1990). With this in mind, phenomenological researchers move beyond developing an understanding of an experience. Instead, the essence of the experience is explored when compared to basic interpretive qualitative research. In case study inquiry, the researcher examines a bound system (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990) as a way to understand a phenomenon. Regarding narrative analysis, the characteristics are similar to those of basic interpretive qualitative inquiry; however, a point of difference is narrative analysis uses stories to explore the experiences of the participants (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Importantly, while both inquiries utilize a semi-structured interview process, narrative analysis is concerned with story building and therefore, the questions may be structured differently. Taking into account the various paradigms of qualitative research, a basic interpretive approach was best suited for this study as it allowed for an in depth exploration of the individual experiences of African American grandmothers residing in rural communities who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren.

**Basic Interpretive Approach**

When a researcher conducts a basic interpretive qualitative study, they are trying to make meaning of a "phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, or a combination of these" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 7). Furthermore, when utilizing an interpretive approach, theory is established, and data collection efforts may be done through interviews, observations, documents or a

combination of sources. For example, the theories of Black feminist thought, human capital, and social capital were utilized to help frame the research. When utilizing the basic interpretive design, the analysis process is inductive where reoccurring patterns are identified to explore the learning and social networking among Black primary caregiving grandmothers. In the end, a thick rich description of the findings is developed (Merriam & Associates). Therefore, a basic interpretive approach was best suited for this study as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the individual experiences of African American grandmothers residing in rural communities who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren.

## Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is to develop strategies that promote ethical practices when interacting with human subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). By promoting such practices, as the researcher, I created an environment where the human subjects understood the risks involved and as participants they were under no obligation to enter or remain as informants against their wishes (Bogdan & Biklen). To aid in this process, I provided the participants with a consent form (Appendix A). Each aspect of the form was explained in detail in order for them to make an informed decision whether to become a participant. Afterwards, the participants were given the opportunity to independently read the document and to pose any questions or concerns. More importantly, the participants were not swayed. In the end, they were the ultimate decision makers when consenting to be participants in the study. Additionally, it is the duty of the researcher to conceal the identity of the participants and to document

information that was reflective of the participants' viewpoints and to avoid fabrication of the data. For this inquiry, I utilized pseudonyms as a way to conceal the identity of the participants. Patton (2002) further noted the role of the researcher is to set the stage that will allow the researcher and the respondent to become a unit as the respondent invites the researcher into their world. Through verbal and non-verbal cues, I made known to the participants that I was not just simply a data collector, but I was also genuinely interested in the messages they were conveying. More importantly, this was a time for them to be heard, and I provided them the space. During this exploration phase, Patton reminds us it is also important for the researcher to maintain a sense of neutrality as a way to prevent personal biases from contaminating the data. Therefore, as the researcher, I listened and refrained from making comments or inferences that could interrupt the data collection efforts. Journaling and more specifically, researcher reflexivity served as a guide in order to maintain neutrality and to prevent personal biases from contaminating the data.

As a Black woman, I shared some commonalities with the grandmothers like cultural behaviors that are distinct to Black women, and more specifically, cultural linguistics (Johnson-Bailey, 2002). According to Etter-Lewis (1991), cultural distinction is recognized as bonds that are formed between Black women (researcher and the informant) without any intervention at work. It happens naturally. Importantly, a sense of security abounds, and portions of the story are told in Black English (Johnson-Bailey, 2002) where the language can be more expressive or heartfelt. Although the oral traditions may not be considered "standard English", it is understood by the commune

and well received (Etter-Lewis). In many instances, the Black researcher becomes privy to valued discourse that may be otherwise unattainable by White researchers under a similar circumstance. Similarly, in this interview process, there were unspoken bonds that were created between me and the informants. Additionally, at times, there was Black English transacted during the interview process. By conducting researcher reflexivity, it helped to bring about awareness of those spoken and unspoken languages to allow for the participants' interpretations to come through more clearly without my influence.

## Researcher Background and Motivation for the Study

I am a doctoral student in Adult Education and Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University. My research interests include urban and rural poverty, economic development among low-income adults, adult literacy, and women's studies. My motivation for this study came, as a result of, taking a class titled Social Welfare and Health Policy. In this class, I was provided with an extant amount of scholarship from researchers in the field namely, Center for Law and Social Policy (2010), Erickson (2000), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2006), regarding families and the foster care system, and particularly kinship care policies. As a result, I became interested in the idea of grandparents as primary caregivers. I coupled this interest with my other interests in adult literacy to conduct a study to examine grandparents as primary caregivers and their participation in family literacy or adult education programs. Based on the findings from that study, my interest and research efforts on grandmothers raising grandchildren continued. During my library searches, I

noticed a large portion of the literature surrounding grandmothers raising grandchildren was situated in an urban context. This left me with great concern for grandmothers raising grandchildren in rural communities, causing me to reflect on my father's narratives of childhood as he and his four siblings were raised by their grandmother.

Widowed at an early age, my paternal great grandmother, Ida, raised her seven children. She also raised my father and his four siblings as she continued to raise her three youngest children. Moreover, they lived in a rural community in Virginia during a time when governmental assistance was not offered to many women especially, poor Black women. Additionally, there were extended family members who also lived in their home. The precise adjectives that would describe Grandma Ida were poor, Black, widowed, the primary caregiver of her grandchildren, and someone who had limited access to resources. Residents of rural communities continue to be plagued with such complexities in more recent times. As a result, I extended my research on grandmothers raising grandchildren to include those grandmothers in rural communities as a way to offer this population of women space in the literature and to share their perspectives.

## Research Process and Design

The research design or process can be identified as an action plan or layout of the investigator's research procedures (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2005). Bogden and Biklen (2007) further noted how researchers proceed based on

> . . . theoretical assumptions (that meaning and process are crucial in understanding human behavior, that descriptive data are what is important to collect, and that analysis is best done inductively), on data collection traditions

(such as participant observation, unstructured interviewing, and document analysis) and on generally stated substantive questions. (p. 55)

In order to understand the realities of this population of grandmothers who reside in rural communities, it was necessary to talk with respondents about their experiences (Merriam & Associates, 2002). To highlight the experiences of African American grandmothers in rural communities, a layout of the research followed.

**Selection Criteria**

Deciding on the number of participants for a study can be quite perplexing. While there is no set figure, Merriam (2009) advised there are several factors such as, the location of study, the evolving analysis, the exchange of information between the human instrument and the participant, and the resource availability, which can help determine the count. Furthermore, researchers can employ a tentative number of participants while keeping the readers informed of the possibility of sample modification. Following Merriam's approach to securing participants, the number of participants and the criteria for inclusion are provided:

1. For this study, each of the participants self-identified as an African American woman. For so long, the voices of women and particularly Black women have been pushed to the margins (Alfred, 2007).
2. Another requirement was for the grandmothers to be the primary caretaker of their grandchildren**.**
3. The last requirement called for the study participants to reside in rural communities within the state of Texas.

**Participant Selection**

In an effort to locate the participants for the study, I turned to the Black church. I chose the Black church for several reasons. First, historically, the Black church served the purpose of worship, socialization, adult education acquisition, and a place to escape the ills of society. Black churches continue to carry out these same traditions in more recent times (Gandy, 1945; Issac, 2010; Issac, Guy, & Valentine, 2001). Secondly, the Black churches have historically been utilized as a way to secure participants for studies conducted to assess the learning and development among African Americans (Isaac, 2010; Issac, Guy, & Valentine, 2001).

In locating participants for my study, I sought out individuals who were familiar with the pastors of churches with predominately Black congregants in both Washington and Burleson Counties. Initially, I was given the name of two pastors. Afterwards, I submitted a letter approved by the Institutional Review Board to these pastors explaining my study and requesting to speak to the congregants. In response, I was given the opportunity to go before their congregation during the announcements as they celebrated Family and Friends Day. While listening to the announcements, I became aware of other Family and Friends Day celebrations occurring at other churches. Coincidentally, some of the pastors from churches in the surrounding area were attending the Family and Friends Day celebration of the first church that I had visited. After the service, I learned of the location of each of their churches and gained their permission speak to their congregants. For over two months, every Sunday evening, I would drive to the churches to locate participants for my study. In the end, I had participated in more than ten Family

and Friends Day celebrations and had obtained seven participants. The remaining three participants were referred by individuals who were partaking in the celebrations.

When acquiring participants through referrals, this can also be identified as a snowball sampling technique (Merriam, 2009). It was important to note, while there were several women who were raising their grandchildren, some did not meet the criteria for the study. For example, one of the participants was excited about participating in the study. However, she lived in Houston, Texas. Houston is not considered a rural community; therefore, she could not participate in the study.

## Data Collection

According to Creswell (2005) researchers engage in data collection or gathering efforts as a way to acquire evidence or documentation to help answer research questions. More importantly, data collection involves the identification of specific participants, gaining the permission of the participants to be studied, and then collecting information relevant to the research question. Creswell (2003) identified four types of data collection procedures. These procedures include observations, interviews, documents, and through audio and visual materials. For this study, interviewing was the primary data collection procedure as it allowed the grandmothers and me to engage in *talk* where exchanges of oral interaction occurred and meaning structures were brought to the fore. However, other forms of data collection like note taking, observation, and digital recording were also employed.

Prior to data collection efforts, approval was gained by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University as I conducted research on human subjects

(Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). More specifically, grandmothers raising grandchildren in rural communities were my study participants.

By adhering to the regulations that the IRB has set fourth, an IRB approved consent form was presented to the grandmothers before each interview session to gain their permission to partake in the study. At that time, the participants was informed they were under no obligation to remain as participants throughout the entire research process. Additionally, each participant was made aware of the minimal risks involved and the nature of the research. Given the nature of this study, there were minimal risks involved for the participants, meaning, there was no anticipation of physical or mental harm imposed on the participants. They were also given a card with my personal contact information and a copy of the consent form if they had additional questions. More importantly, each of the participants were treated with dignity and respect and given opportunities to ask questions and seek clarification during and after the interview process.

According to Johnson (2001), such interviewing seeks to garner very profound information about an "individual's personal matters, such as an individual's self, lived experiences, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective" (p. 104). According to some researchers, talk is an essential ingredient when researchers are utilizing interviews (Powney & Watts, 1987) or in-depth interviewing (Johnson, 2001) as a tool for data collection purposes. Johnson further indicated when talk occurs between the informant and the researcher it is not the chatter that may occur between best friends. Instead, it is more purpose driven where data is

acquired through oral interactions existing between the researcher and the participants. Similarly, Hatch (2002) referred to interviews as specific conversations between the informant and the researcher as the investigator explores the informant's experiences. Furthermore, these interviews became the foundation in order to help bring to the surface the vantage points or meaning structures of grandmothers raising their grandchildren in rural communities in the context of caregiving, human capital, and social capital development.

Based upon the information provided, interviewing was essential to the data collection procedure as it helped to set the stage for the grandmothers in the study by allowing them to express their feelings, share impressions, and to reconstruct their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When conducting interviews Johnson (2001) asserted a more in-depth approach to interviewing provides the gateway for the researcher to achieve some semblance of the experiences of the real-life members or participants. To add, there is a teacher-learner approach where the interviewer learns the ways or life experiences of the informant or participant. During the interview process, as the researcher, I took notes and documented inferences made through observed experiences during the interviews as it helped in the meaning making during the data analysis process. While note taking and observation were relevant to the data collection process, when relying solely on such resources meaning structures that are captured through talk have the potential of being hidden or unnoticed (Powney & Watts, 1987). Therefore, the merging of interviewing, note taking, and observations, helped to enrich data collection efforts.

## Interview Process

According to Johnson (2001), during the interview there is a question and answer process performed in order to stimulate a dialogue between the informant and the researcher that entails an asking and answering of questions. Johnson cautioned there may be some asymmetry involved in the sense the researcher has developed a protocol comprised of questions to serve as an interview guide while remaining within the framework of the study. However, during the interview the researcher takes a more passive approach in the interview process with the hopes the informant may become more communicative as the interview progresses. When making a comparison, Johnson championed for a more non-standard approach often referring to this method as a more realistic approach to interviewing. Moreover, this non-standard interviewing process allows for the veering from the interview protocol offering the flexibility for the participant to speak unreservedly about their experiences. In his works, Johnson referred to the flexible protocol as non-standard while Merriam (2009) often referred to this approach as a semi-structured interview process. Hence, the non-standard or semi-structured interview process was utilized in this study to garner the lived experiences of African American primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities.

**Semi-structured interviews.** During the semi-structured interview process, with an exploratory intent, the grandmothers were asked to respond to questions from an interview protocol. The protocol was separated into three parts including, caregiving, education, and social networks. Under the heading of caregiving, the questions were developed as a way to help to bring together some background information about the

participants in the study and how they had come to be the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. The section titled education offered questions that helped to describe the grandmothers' human capital development. Such questions centered on the education, training, and learning activities among the participants in the study. In the section regarding social networking, the questions were developed as a way to understand the social capital development and networking among grandmothers in rural communities. The protocol was comprised of 25 interview (Appendix B) questions developed according to the information collected during an examination of the literature (Merriam, 2009). In response, the grandmothers made known their experiences as the primary caretaker in the contexts of caregiving, human capital, and social capital development. For this study, the interviews lasted for approximately 90 minutes and were conducted in a one-on-one forum, as I posed the questions and provided the grandmothers the opportunity to reply to open-ended questions where the exchange of rich dialogue occurred.

**One-on-one interviews.** Conducting the interviews in a one-on-one setting instead of focus groups provided the grandmothers the opportunity to give voice to their experiences without the possibility of interruptions imposed by other participants (Kruger & Casey, 2009). Additionally, one-on-one sessions offered the time and space needed for personal attention to be given to each of the caretakers as they constructed their personal narratives. By conducting the interviews in a one-on-one forum, I was given the time and space to conceptualize both the verbal and non-verbal communication efforts of the grandmothers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Based on the nature of the research, I conducted one-on-one interview sessions with ten women who, (a) identified as African American, (b) who were the primary caregivers of their grandchildren, and (c) who resided in a rural community. Five of the interviews were conducted at a local restaurant and two of them were conducted in a room at the City Mission. Although the remaining participants were given the opportunity to choose a public location for interviewing, they chose to be interviewed at their place of residence. At the permission of the respondents the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

**Digital Recording**

During an interview process when a researcher relies solely on note taking she may miss important information that the respondents have stated. Therefore, a digital recorder was another data collection method utilized for the study (Powney & Watts, 1987). More importantly, by utilizing a recorder, it enabled me to focus my attention on the grandmothers as they gave an account of their learning experiences as primary caretaker. Prior to recording, I provided reasons as to why I was recording and gained the permission of the participants. The participants agreed to be digitally recorded. The participants were also informed if at any time they rejected being recorded, note taking would become the primary source for data collection during the study.

**Transcriptions**

I began the transcription process within 24 hours of completing each interview. For the majority of the interviews, the transcribing lasted at least eight hours. My decision to transcribe the data was twofold. First, I decided to be solely responsible for

the data collection and transcription processes as a way to stay in close contact with the data. Secondly, as the transcriber, I could also capture the stories as told during the interview. Therefore, I remained as the primary transcriber converting word for word each participant's responses into text data.

## Participant Appreciation

Historically, studies have indicated that often participants are key contributors to data collection efforts and have not been duly compensated for their contributions to the research. An African American woman, Henrietta Lacks, is among those participants (Skloot, 2010). According to Skloot, during the late 1940s, when diagnosed with cervical cancer, Henrietta's cells were cut from her cervix. These cells are what biologists have referred to over the years as HeLa cells. Here, the fascination with Heneriett's cells was that they had the ability to live and reproduce outside of the body (Skloot, 2010). Moreover, for decades, these cells have been bought, sold, and utilized in many scientific research undertakings without Henrietta receiving compensation. For this inquiry, the role the Black grandmothers played in the research process did not go unnoticed. By expressing gratitude, upon completion of the interview, each participant was presented with a $10 gift card as a token of appreciation. As the researcher, this act of kindness was also done as a way to pay homage to those research participants who have gone before and have not been duly compensated, like Henrietta Lacks.

## Data Analysis

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) analysis is the process by which the researcher gives meaning to the data. More specifically, analysis involves "taking data

apart, conceptualizing it, and developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions in order to determine what the parts tell us about the whole" (p. 64). In order to analyze the data for the current study, Creswell's (2003) six-step method for data analysis was employed. The six steps were: (a) organizing and preparing the data for an analysis process, (b) reading through the transcripts in their entirety to generate meaning, (c) develop a narrative passage or charts that represent the findings from the analysis, (d) implementing a coding process where data is segmented, (e) continued coding process were the segmented data is organized into themes or categories, and (f) giving meaning to the interpreted data.

**Phase 1—Organizing and Preparing Data**

At the early stages of the analysis process the audio-taped responses from the interview with each grandmother were converted into text data through a process known as transcription (Creswell, 2005). More specifically, the recorded conversations or raw data were transcribed verbatim. Similarly, the notes taken during the interview along with observed experiences were also included with the transcriptions. As noted previously, upon completion of the interview, the transcription process was conducted with immediacy to preserve the richness of the data. The transcribed data coupled with the notes taken during the interview with the grandmothers were organized in preparation for the actual data analysis process.

**Phase 2—Thorough Reading of all the Transcribed Data**

During this phase of the analysis process, I repeatedly read each participant's transcribed responses along with the notes that I had taken in their entirety. Periodically,

I would put the transcribed data aside and ponder and return to the data trying to make meaning. This sort of brainstorming process allowed for the opportunity to make meaning or draw impressions from the grandmothers' responses at a more fundamental level. In drawing impressions words, phrases, and concepts that highlighted each participant's background were identified. Identifying such characteristics contributed to the construction of the participants' personal narratives.

**Phase 3—Developing a Narrative Passage or Charts**

During this phase of the analysis, I developed a brief profile of each the participants in the form of a case story. The profile provided a snapshot of each of the grandmothers as a way for readers to develop a clearer picture of the study participants. Some of the defining characteristics included: name of the grandmother, age, number of grandchildren in care, and marital status. As part of the development of the participant's personal narratives, a history of schooling, reasons for grandparental care, and characteristics of children, and so on were also included. As a supporting document, a chart was developed as a way to provide a profile of the grandmothers. Each of the grandmothers was given a pseudonym as a way to ensure confidentiality.

**Phase 4—Coding the Data**

Coding is an inductive process researchers employ in order to make sense out of the data (Creswell, 2005). The text data underwent a transformational process where large amounts of text data were transformed into more meaningful words. More specifically, the data were segmented, coded, categorized, given thematic identification, and interpreted. It was important to note, the research was organized into three sections

including, caregiving, human capital, and social capital development. Therefore, each section was analyzed utilizing the following processes.

At the onset of data analysis, with the transcribed data, I conducted what can be identified as a process known as open-coding. More specifically, each manuscript of transcribed data was examined line-by-line and situated into segments or units of analysis. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are some criteria for identifying units of analysis. First, the units should be heuristic in nature, or the information should be closely related to the study. When unitizing the data, I identified small phrases, sentences, or small paragraphs that were central to the study. For example, the respondents used such phrases as, such as: "I just wanted to," "it was just something in me," or "I just wanted to learn" to described their reasons for participating in adult education programming. Secondly, according to the Lincoln and Guba, the unit should be easily interpreted giving meaning to the phenomenon being studied. As such, the units or segmented data mined clearly identified the grandmothers' experiences and helped to give meaning to the exploration of African American primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities.

Once identified, each unit of data was transferred to a 4x6 note card. Most often note cards are plain white in color. Alternatively, I worked with colored notecards. Each participant was assigned a color and the unitized data representing the voice of each participant was situated on their respective colored note card. By placing the unitized data on colored cards instead of the typical white cards helped to keep the data organized. The note cards also identified specific information about each of the

grandmothers in the study. Such information included card number, participant identification (pseudonym), page of transcription, and units. By organizing the data onto the colored note cards, it made it easier to trace the data back to its primary source**.** After transferring each unit of data onto a separate note card, a code word was assigned to each card that accurately described each unit of analysis. A master list of code words or phrases was generated (Creswell, 2005).

**Phase 5--Organizing Data into Categories or Themes**

Following this, I grouped the notecards with similar code words or phrases together. This process can be identified as categorization. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the purpose of categorization is "to bring together into provisional categories those cards that relate to the same content" (p. 347). This process continued until all notecards had been examined. In the end, each card was examined and assigned to a category.

Next, I conducted a comparative analysis where the list of categories was reexamined in order to check for missed or emerging codes (Patton, 1990). Also, during this time, those codes or phrases that were not relevant to the research were identified and placed into a separate pile. Then, I reexamined the relationships between categories that were identified, reexamined the notes taken, and reexamined the case stories in order to identify the categories that best described the experiences of African American primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities in the contexts of caregiving, human capital, and social capital development.

Once the categories were defined, I searched for patterns or regularities among categories in order to identify themes (Creswell, 1998). A theme was abstracted from each of those categories that were found to be the most unified. For example, under the research findings entitled human capital development emerging themes namely, formal learning, informal learning, and motivation, just to name a few were identified.

Then, I performed a third pass through the data performing a comparative analysis. Here, I reexamined or thoroughly scrutinized themes making comparisons with the data and emerging themes. For example, when analyzing the data regarding social networking, I thoroughly reexamined the findings to make certain the interconnection of human capital and social capital were made evident in the research. By doing so, I attempted to display how learning occurred to some extent systematically through social networking leading to upward mobility. During the analysis process, when making the connection between learning and social capital, such themes as micro-systems of support, macro-systems of support, and social networks as avenues for knowledge construction emerged. Also, during this reexamination process, I identified subthemes that also helped to describe the experiences of African American primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities. For example, paying close attention to the thematic heading of motivation, during the third round of analysis, there were some subthemes that were identified including, personal development and career advancement.

In more lay terms, the data was put through three rounds of analysis in order to identify relevant themes and then subthemes that helped to describe the experiences of African American primary caregiving grandmothers. Specifically, during the second

round, the themes were identified and the potential subthemes were placed in a separate pile followed by documentation. In the third round of analysis, the subthemes were more recognizable and clearly defined. It was important to note, throughout the analysis when identifying the themes and subthemes that were most relevant to the study, I read and reread the units to listen for those words, phrases, or concepts that were iterative.

**Phase 6—Developing Interpretations from the Data**

At this phase, I developed a report that captured the major insights derived from the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For this study, the report was divided into three sections including, summary, discussion, and implications and recommendations. The summary highlighted key points in the research, namely statement of purpose, theories utilized in the study, themes and subthemes identified in the study, and background information regarding the participants and their grandchildren as it was presented by the grandmothers. In the discussion section, the research questions were outlined as each question was answered and connections were drawn to the literature. The themes and subthemes most meaningful to the research were emphasized. Following, based on the findings, implications were made for research, policy, and practice. Recommendations were also considered regarding the future directions of research.

## Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the data can be examined by utilizing various validity procedures (Calabrese, 2006). According to Creswell and Miller (2000) these validity procedures can include; "triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, collaboration, the audit

trail, and thick, rich description" (pp. 126- 127). In an effort to make my data trustworthy to my readers, I utilized three methods including, member checking, researcher reflexivity, and thick descriptions.

**Member Checking**

Each interview lasted for approximately 90 minutes. To add, the transcription process lasted at least 8 hours per interview. During this time, it is easy for information to become misunderstood or misinterpreted. As such, upon completion of the interview it was requested that each participant schedule a second meeting to go over the transcribed reports. Only six of the grandmothers requested a second meeting. Prior to the meeting, I asked the participants to review the transcripts and the case story to make certain the data collected were accurate or reflected the messages the participant were trying to convey (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

**Researcher Reflexivity**

Merriam and Associates (2002) asserted critical reflection provides opportunities for the researcher to assess personal operations to make certain they have not influenced the research, thereby contaminating the data. Therefore, during the research process, I performed what can be identified as field journaling as I developed documentation during the interview process for reflection purposes (Krefting, 1991). As the human instrument and a Black woman, I had to constantly reflect to make certain my views were not coming through in the research. The journaling helped to identify certain behaviors both verbal and non-verbal that could possibly affect the data collection efforts or influence how the grandmothers responded to the questions or engaged in the

dialogical process. Therefore, the participants and I engaged in conversation while sharing their experiences as mothers for a second time. For the grandmothers who were elderly, during the conversation (interviewing), I was mindful of their position and remained respectful during this process.

**Thick Descriptions**

Another approach commonly utilized in qualitative research is the practice of thick descriptions that help to illuminate the findings. According to Patton (2002) such descriptions can contribute greatly to the trustworthiness of the data as it offers the reader a more clear understanding of the findings. For example, when Jacqueline shared her educational experiences she explained,

> Once I finished school I left home and went to Homer Business College. I did not graduate. I got pregnant and married. After being married for a while, I took some classes to be a Certified Nurse's Aide. And I became a Certified Medical Assistant. I didn't go to nursing school. I could have that just wasn't the road I chose to take.

In order for the readers to understand the grandmothers' narratives completely, I offered a thick rich description of their experiences.

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities to understand how they learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. Here, in chapter III, I provided a detailed

description of the methodology section for the basic interpretive qualitative study that was conducted. The tenants outlining the methodology section were discussed in the following sequence, (a) role and responsibility of the researcher, (b) methodological framework, (c) research process and design, (d) data collection, (f) data analysis, and (g) trustworthiness. The findings will be discussed in the following chapter**.**

# CHAPTER IV

# RESEARCH FINDINGS

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities within the state of Texas to understand how they learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. Given the current state of rural communities, it was important to capture the stories, experiences, and perceptions of those residents who may have memberships in marginalized groups like Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. As such, the following questions guided this study:

1. How do Black primary caregiving grandmothers residing in rural communities develop human capital?
2. How do social networks contribute to the learning and development of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities?
3. How do caregiving grandmothers utilize the knowledge and skills acquired from human and social capital in the caretaking of their grandchildren?

The state of Texas served as the primary location for data collection. As such, this chapter opens with background information regarding the rural communities existing within the state of Texas, followed by a description of the two counties selected for data collection purposes.

**The State of Texas**

When narrowing the focus, American Fact Finder (2011) reported there were nearly four million Blacks residing in the state of Texas. As of 2011, Texas was third in the nation possessing the largest population of Blacks when compared to states like New York and then Florida. Such areas as Houston and Dallas/Fort Worth were among cities with the largest populations of Blacks (Black Demographics, 2011). Following, while the numbers were not as substantial, there were still a considerable number of Blacks residing in cities like San Antonio, Austin, and Beaumont, Texas. Paying even closer attention to its population, there were 254 existing counties within the state of Texas; and of these, 177 counties were identified as rural communities (Rural Fast Facts, 2012). More importantly, Black Demographics posited the majority of the remaining populations of Blacks within the state of Texas were located in other smaller cities or rural counties in more eastern and southeastern regions. For the populations of grandparents raising grandchildren, it was reported that of the nearly four million Blacks residing within the state of Texas, nearly two million ages 30 and older were the primary caregivers of their grandchildren (American Fact Finder, 2011).

The United States Department of Agriculture (2013) reported as of 2012, the state of Texas was comprised of 254 counties, and of these counties, 175 were classified as rural. Sharply narrowing the focus to the Brazos Valley, the research targeted the seven counties in that region. These counties included Brazos, Grimes, Madison, Leon, Robertson, Burleson, and Washington. Brazos County alone encompasses six cities and towns with a total population of 200,665 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Situated south

and southwest respectively of Brazos County, the counties of Washington and Burleson were identified as comprising a large percentage of rural communities (Data-City, 2011a, b). As a result, the ten grandmothers interviewed were residents of either Washington or Burleson County. Importantly, these two neighboring counties were selected to avoid utilizing isolated counties to serve as locations for participant selection.

**Washington County.** Founded in 1836, Washington County has developed into an area consisting of 33,791 residents with 47% of the population residing in more suburban communities, and 54% of its population living in rural communities (City-Data, 2011b). Importantly, Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics make up the majority of the population at 66.4%, 17.4%, and 13.8% respectively. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012a), between 2007 and 2011 there were 22, 287 residents over the age of 25; of these residents, at least 30% had earned at least a high school diploma or its equivalency, while only 17% had earned a bachelor's degree. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau also showed that there were 26,686 individuals who were of working age (16 years and over) in Washington County between 2007 and 2011. Of these 26,686 individuals, approximately 57% were part of the labor force, and another 95% were employed. Less than 5% of the population was unemployed. Although eligible, 42% of the population was not in the labor force. City Data (2011b) showed that as of 2009, the median annual household income for Washington County residents was $44,431, with 17% of the population living below the federal poverty line. Paying close attention to race, 43.1% of the Hispanic residents, 33.6% of the Black residents, and 9% of the White residents lived below the federal poverty line, respectively. It was reported that

the major employers for residents in Washington County were Brenham State Supported Living Center (a school for persons with mental illness), Blue Bell Creamers, and Brenham Independent School District (Washington County Chamber, Texas, 2012).

**Burleson County.** According to City-Data (2011a), there were 21 cities or towns making up Burleson County with a population of 17,291 individuals. Only 12% of the Burleson County population is Black. Additionally, at least 83% of Burleson County residents lived in rural communities. Seventy-six percent of the residents were said to have earned at least a high school education while only 11.3% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). It was further reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2012b) that approximately 13,508 of the residents of Burleson County were of the working age, and 7,857 residents (58%) made up the labor force with 54% being employed and only 3% unemployed. City-Data conceded that as of 2009, the median household income for residents in Burleson County was $39,917 with 17.4 % of the population living below the federal poverty line. Blacks were identified as being the highest population of residents living below the federal poverty line at 37.1%, with Hispanics following at 24.7%, and Whites at 11.2%. City-Data confirmed the major employers in Burleson County included Summerville Independent School District (ISD), Snook Independent School District (ISD), Kopper Industries, Slovacek Sausage Company, Citizen State Bank, and Brookshire Brothers (B&B) Grocery Store. Because the ten grandmothers who participated in this study were from either Washington or Burleson counties, it was important to highlight the background information. In doing so, the acquisition of pertinent information coupled with a look at their rural

communities helped in the development of a profile of the grandmothers and the children under their care.

## Profile of the Grandmothers and the Children in their Care

A profile representing demographic information for each of the ten participants is included in Table 1. Such components included, name marital status, age, number of children, education, and employment. A more detailed description of the participants is included in subsequent paragraphs.

The grandmothers shared detailed background information and their experiences as the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. It was important to help bring to light the characteristics of these grandmothers as a way for the reader to become acquainted with the participants. In order to help build this connection, a rich description of both

Table 1

*Demographic Profile of Participants*

| Name | Marital Status | Age | Number of Children | Education | Employment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jacqueline | Married | 60 | 3*+ | High School | Retired |
| Connie | Married | 44 | 1 | 9th Grade | Fulltime |
| Darlene (gg) | Married | 78 | 1+ | 9th Grade | Retired/Volunteers |
| Lottie | Married | 55 | 1+ | High School | Fulltime |
| Blossie | Single | 49 | 3 | 11th Grade | Unemployed |
| Kassey | Single | 53 | 5 | High School | Fulltime |
| Ida | Single | 74 | 2+ | 11th Grade | Full Disability |
| Gracie | Married | 53 | 1 | High School | Fulltime |
| Mathilda | Widowed | 71 | 3+ | 10th Grade | Part-time |
| Tessa | Widowed | 57 | 1 | High School | Retired |

*Note*. *=Raising a child other than their grandchild
+=Raised another grandchild or grandchildren or great grandchild at some point in time
gg=Great-grandmother

their family and educational history are presented as well as a description of the children and how they had come be in the care of their grandparents. An explication of the advantages and disadvantages to caretaking is also presented. Representations of each of the ten participants, namely, Jacqueline, Connie, Darlene, Lottie, Blossie, Kassey, Ida, Gracie, Mathilda, and Tessa are discussed below.

**Jacqueline**

With her extra-full-figure, "grandma" arms, and loving spirit, Jacqueline immediately reminded me of "Big Momma"—the grandmother character in the movie *Soul Food*. As a mother of eight children, Jacqueline insisted that she had enough love to go around. Jacqueline had been married for over 30 years.

After graduating from high school, Jacqueline attended a business college for a period of time. Throughout her lifespan, she has also taken courses to become a Certified Nurse's Aide and Certified Medical Assistant. As a mental health professional, Jacqueline has taken continuing education courses to earn certifications in Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), Patient Management of Aggressive Behavior (PMAB), and behavior management training. She has also engaged in various management training programs. By participating in these various courses, she was able to advance into management roles within her organization. Jacqueline has since retired as a supervisor in the mental health profession.

At the age of 65, Jacqueline is currently raising three grandchildren and raised three others whose mother recently moved back in with Jacqueline and her husband. The grandchildren in her care are ages 13, 14, and 17 years old. The two younger

children have been living in her home for approximately five years while the 17-year-old has been in her care since infancy. Jacqueline and her husband began caring for the oldest grandson when their daughter could no longer provide the financial support needed to care for him as an infant. In recent years, Jacqueline's daughter experienced some additional economic hardships, causing the younger children to come and live in her home. Also, in spreading her love, Jacqueline is raising a two-year-old boy whose mother is a friend of one of her children. Although Jacqueline has assumed the role of primary caretaker, the children continue to have a relationship with their mother.

As the primary caretaker, Jaqueline has been charged with the responsibility of not only providing adequate care to her grandchildren, but also making sure they are developing academically. Since coming under her care, the younger children have experienced some difficulties in math. Because Jacqueline was unable to assist them, she sought some assistance through summer school and tutoring services. Paying close attention to the eldest grandson, during his early years, he was diagnosed with dyslexia. Recently, and without Jacqueline's approval, his biological mother signed him out of school. As high school graduates, Jacqueline and her husband understand the value in education, and for this reason, Jacqueline has been trying to locate GED programming for her grandson.

As their primary caretaker, it has been a benefit to Jacqueline to be able to oversee the daily living of the children in her care. While they are in her home, she is assured they are receiving adequate nourishment, and she regularly monitors the children's school attendance and performance. However, for Jacqueline, being able to

help with homework has been a challenge. Although she understands math, the methods applied in math classes today are unfamiliar to her. Despite that challenge, she continues to try and meet the everyday needs of the children.

**Connie**

At the age of 44 Connie was the youngest of all the grandmothers in the study. A very petite and soft-spoken woman, Connie used this interview as a way to open up and talk very candidly about her experiences. During her preteen years, her parents separated and she went to live with her aunt and uncle. When she turned 14, she moved back with her mother but realized she lacked the many luxuries she experienced with her aunt and uncle. With the mediocre lifestyle that her mother was able to provide, Connie felt ashamed. More and more, Connie began missing school. Since her mother did not force her into returning, she eventually stopped out in the ninth grade.

When Connie turned 21, she became pregnant and continued to live in her mother's home while raising her daughter. When her daughter turned three years old, Connie began working in the mental health field, assisting mentally ill patients. Since then, she has taken courses to become a certified nurse's aide and certified medication aide. Being a medication aid allows her to administer medication to patients. Although she has taken coursework that is applicable to the mental health field, she is currently employed at a creamery.

Connie's daughter became pregnant at the age of 16 and lived with Connie for six weeks after she delivered the baby. After these six weeks, Connie's daughter began coming home less and less and eventually took up residence with some friends, leaving

the baby with Connie. For a period of time, her daughter's whereabouts were unknown and because of her inconsistent lifestyle, Connie could not place her grandson into her care. Well versed in the effects of an inconsistent way of living, Connie along with her husband made the decision to become the primary caretakers of the infant boy. The salary from her job at the creamery helps Connie with the caretaking of her grandson.

Currently, Connie's grandson is six years old and an honor roll student at a faith-based school. While the biological parents are in his life, they are unable to give him the time he needs. Connie noted that when the mother comes to visit, she and the boy behave as brother and sister instead of mother and son. They both refer to Connie as their mother. When Connie's grandson visits his paternal grandmother, he also visits with his father.

Since Connie's daughter developed habits of being inaccessible for extended periods of time, along with taking up residency in various places, it was advantageous for the child to live in her home permanently. By living in her home, Connie can provide a more stable living environment for him. However, with a young child living in the home, it has created a loss of freedom for both Connie and her husband. For example, when Connie and her husband decide to travel, they have to take into consideration the caretaking of her grandson. Their plans are no longer centered on her and her husband. Instead, they have to constantly make decisions in the best interest of the grandchild. Sometimes, this means a cancellation in plans.

**Darlene**

Darlene is the mother of eight children and at the time of data collection she was 78 years old. After becoming pregnant in the ninth grade, Darlene did not return to high school to meet the requirements to receive her diploma because of the stigma attached to teen pregnancy at the time. Instead, she began working to take care of her child. Later, she would marry and become the mother of eight children.

Darlene retired from her job after 25 years in custodial services. However, she has not fully retired; she continues to work one day per week cleaning the home of a private family. She also volunteers at a shelter serving homeless families. During her tenure in custodial services, she participated in various continuing education courses about chemical safety, housekeeping, equipment usage, and management training. As a result, she earned several certifications. By participating in such programming, she was able to advance into a leadership role within her organization.

Initially, Darlene began caring for her great granddaughter on a part-time basis when her daughter was stricken with a terminal illness. Although Darlene's grandson was the father of the baby girl, the biological parents were unable to provide adequate care due to their frequent arrests and multiple periods of incarceration for drug charges. Even more, there were others who could have shared in the responsibilities for caring for the child, but no one volunteered. At that time, the baby was about 14 months old. As her daughter's condition worsened, Darlene cared for the baby more frequently. Eventually, her daughter succumbed to the disease and Darlene took on full-time care of the child. By the time Darlene began caring for the baby full-time, she had retired

from her primary employer. Darlene also raised her great-grand-daughter's brother until he was five years old.

Currently, Darlene's great granddaughter is 14 years old. Although the granddaughter has four younger siblings, the biological mother is providing care for the other children. As the primary caretaker, Darlene has sought assistance to help her granddaughter deal with some psychological issues stemming from her parents being absent from her life. Also, to aid in the development of the child in her care, Darlene has purchased tutoring services to assist her granddaughter with math. Darlene has also enrolled her in summer school, even when it was not required, to help her keep up with her subjects.

In recounting the experiences of caring for the child, Darlene did not find the duties to be rewarding. Although she did not regret being the primary caregiver, she found caring for a child was a very difficult task, especially in the area of discipline. Darlene grew up in an era where individuals were allowed to spank their children. Also, during those times, and according to Darlene, when the parents made a request, the children did what they were told without any backtalk. Also, while raising her own children, when a request was made, her children responded without rebuttal. They were respectful to Darlene and her husband. Darlene noted that her granddaughter's behavior was in stark contrast to what she encountered when she was raising her children. For instance, her granddaughter "*talks back*" and often displays behaviors that are considered to be disrespectful. Because specific laws have been put in place to protect children from corporeal punishment, Darlene feels that parents have lost their power to

be disciplinarians. Because of these issues, Darlene does not see the benefits of caregiving.

**Lottie**

At age 55, Lottie is the mother of four children. Growing up, Lottie had an absentee mother and by the time she was ten years old her father had passed away. Although she had older siblings to help care for her, she noted that she practically raised herself. After graduating from high school, Lottie began working full-time. By the time she was 19 years old, Lottie had given birth to two of her four children. Before she reached the age of 24, Lottie was a single mother caring for four small children. At the age of 25 Lottie married her husband and admitted her good fortune to have met and married a man who was not the father of her four children. Even though they were not his biological children, he played a significant role in their development as most biological fathers would. He worked on the railroad for over 30 years in order to provide for Lottie and her children.

Currently, Lottie works for the local school district as a teacher's assistant in a tutoring lab. She has been working for the school district for almost 21 years. She started as a custodian and transitioned into the role as an assistant in the school cafeteria. Then, she transitioned into the role of teacher's assistant. As a teacher's assistant, she has participated in various continuing education courses and workshops provided by her employer. For example, she has taken various classes regarding behavior management which enables her to address student behavior appropriately while maintaining control of the learning environment. Because Lottie can help the students with their assignments,

the teachers assume that she has more than a high school education. Sometimes Lottie finds it disturbing to have not obtained beyond a high school education. However, she has developed aspirations of one day obtaining her associate's degree and then earning a bachelor's degree.

As the grandmother of nineteen grandchildren and one great-grandchild, Lottie's grandchildren range in age from 2 to 19 years old. While she has been the primary caregiver of a large number of her grandchildren at some point in time, she is currently the primary caretaker of her six-year-old granddaughter. Since her daughter was forced to work long hours making it difficult to care for her child, Lottie stepped in to become the primary caretaker; however, her daughter remains active in the child's life. Lottie's granddaughter maintains a B average despite her challenges with math. To help with her math, Lottie enrolled her in an afterschool program in order to receive the tutoring support. Her grandchild is also active in church, taking part in activities including the youth usher board and praise dancing.

As a young mother of four children who did not have the luxury of having her mother's assistance in the caretaking of her children, Lottie feels compelled to help raise her grandchildren. She admitted by raising her granddaughter, with the help of her husband, she can afford to provide some of the things that she was not able to give to her own children. Another advantage to caretaking is the ability to stay informed. Since her grandchild lives in her home, Lottie can stay abreast of some of the matters regarding children and young adults. Also, as the primary caregiver, can have greater input in the way in which her granddaughter is being raised.

Although Lottie enjoys caring for her grandchild, there is a downside to caretaking. For example, being able to strike a balance between spoiling her grandchild and being a disciplinarian has been challenging. While raising her children, when Lottie told them "no," the answer was final. Since raising her granddaughter Lottie has become more lenient, giving in to some of the child's requests. The leniency has also caused some problems between Lottie and her children and the other grandchildren. Her children and the other grandchildren seem to think Lottie shows more favoritism towards the child in her care. Trying to manage the conflicts can be challenging.

**Blossie**

At age 49, Blossie is the single head of her household and mother to three daughters and one son. She has been single and head of her household beginning with the birth of her first child. After becoming pregnant in the eleventh grade, Blossie did not return to meet the requirements to earn a high school diploma. Two years later, she had another child. In the following years, Blossie had a total of four children. As a single mother, her life has centered on the constant raising of children. While she was raising her children, her daughter became pregnant at a young age, and she became the primary caretaker of her grandchild. She remained the primary caregiver until the child reached 11 years old. Because she spent much of her life raising children, Blossie did not acquire any experiences outside of the home. Currently, she is unemployed.

Moreover, Blossie has not engaged in any formal education programming outside of high school, but has acquired skills through informal learning experiences. For example, through personal experiences, she has learned how to manage her money in

order to care for her children on a marginal income. In more lay terms, Blossie has learned how to make her money stretch in order to make ends meet. By developing such money management skills, she has also learned to save for emergency situations.

Currently, she is the primary caregiver of her youngest daughter's children, ages five, four, and three. As the mother of a daughter who is residentially unstable, Blossie wanted a better life for her grandchildren. With her very assertive demeanor, she demanded that her daughter leave the children in her care. Paying close attention to the oldest children, Blossie expressed some concerns about their behavior. For example, the five-year-old has displayed some behavioral issues, and it has affected his academic performance. Blossie suggested that he was responding to his parents' separation and the absenteeism of his mother. Based on existing behavior, she also predicted that her four-year-old grandson would possibly display similar behaviors when he starts kindergarten.

In exploring the advantages of caregiving, Blossie found it beneficial to raise her grandchildren in her home as a way to offer them a more stable living environment. Since the biological mother has no stable housing, Blossie often worried about their living arrangements, how they were being cared for, and their food intake. As the caretaker, Blossie knows the children are being cared for in a stable home environment.

As Blossie offered the advantages to caretaking, she also mentioned the challenges to caring for the children. Because her grandson had some issues with discipline, his teachers often called with concerns regarding his behavior. Trying to manage her grandson's behavior along with raising the other children has been a difficult task.

**Kassey**

At first glance, Kassey's four-foot stature and timid and shy appearance can be deceptive. At age 53, Kassey is the mother of three children and has been the single head of household since raising her own children. She continues to reside in a rural community where she grew up. Upon completion of high school, Kassey began working full-time.

Over the years, she has worked in the mental health field in various group home environments. While working as a mental health professional, Kassey participated in continuing education courses offered by her employer. For example, she participated in courses where she earned certificates in Certified Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), and Patient Management of Aggressive Behaviors (PMAB). She has also engaged in coursework to learn how to administer medication to patients that suffer from mental illness. Currently, she is employed full-time in the mental health profession and works part-time at a local grocery store.

Kassey is the primary caregiver of five grandchildren ages, eleven, seven, six, four, and one. Kassey has two daughters. The children in her care are a combination of both daughters' children. Due to the daughters' residential instability, Kassey became the primary caretaker. In lay terms, both of Kassey's daughters were constantly moving from place to place with their children in tow. As a result, Kassey insisted they leave the children with her until they were able to provide a more stable home for their children.

Currently, three of her grandchildren are enrolled in a nearby elementary school while one of the younger children is enrolled in a pre-kindergarten program. The

children who are of school-age perform well academically. Caring for her grandchildren has been advantageous because it allows Kassey to offer them some stability with the children attending one school on a consistent basis. Kassey did not view any parts of the caretaking as challenging because she preferred for the children to be in her home where they were receiving proper care and attention.

**Ida**

At age 74, Ida is the mother of one daughter and has been the primary caregiver of all four of her grandchildren since birth. Ida is one of five children. Upon reflecting on her past, Ida recalled moving in with her grandparents as a result of her mother coming to the realization that she no longer wanted to raise children. By the time she turned 13, Ida's grandmother had allowed her to return to live with her mother, but her mother could not care for her. For a short period, Ida lived with her father and then an uncle. In the end, she moved back to live with her grandparents.

By the time Ida was 16 years old, she was living on her own. She stopped out of school in the eleventh grade and continued working in the retail business. For a short period, she attended night school, but because the school was located in a dangerous neighborhood, it became difficult for Ida to continue with courses. Later on, she enrolled in a General Education Diploma (GED) program, but the lack of transportation forced her to stop out; hence, she did not complete the diploma.

After several years of working in the retail business, Ida began working for the local school district attending to children who were hearing impaired. Much of Ida's learning stems from informal experiences. More specifically, Ida learned how to teach

children who were hearing impaired by watching the lead teachers and mirroring similar behaviors. While working with hearing-impaired children, she became proficient in sign language. After working in the school district for several years, Ida began experiencing some health issues. As a result, she left the school district and began receiving disability. She currently receives full disability.

Ida began caring for her grandchildren after her daughter became addicted to drugs. As a result of her drug addiction, each time Ida's daughter would give birth, she would leave the hospital in an abrupt manner to resume her life of drugs. Since she also left the baby behind in the hospital with each birth, Ida had to step in and take the baby to her home.

Once when Ida's 10-year-old grandson was visiting his mom for the weekend, he was killed by a hit-and-run driver. Because of his father's gang affiliation, gang violence erupted in retaliation of the tragic accident. For protection, Ida and the other grandchildren had to go into hiding for an extended period. Now, Ida's oldest granddaughter is a college student, and although she is 21 years old, Ida continues to support her financially. Ida also cares for another granddaughter and grandson who are ages 15 and 17, respectively while her daughter, the children's biological mother, continues to live in California. The relationship between the mother and the children has been negatively impacted by distance as well as by life altering events. Although they enjoy the luxury of cell phones, the phone calls are not frequent, and the two older children seldom communicate with their biological mother. Because the youngest child desires to have a closer relationship with her biological mother, she communicates with

her mother more often than the other children. Often, the conversations are comprised of unfulfilled promises made by the mother.

Currently, both of Ida's grandchildren are academically average students. However, at one point, Ida experienced some discipline issues with her grandson which was impacting his performance in school. In order to address these issues, Ida sought help from an individual who was part of a disciplinary program. Through his engagement in the program, coupled with Ida's prayers, her grandson's behavior began to improve. Soon, the discipline issues subsided. Furthermore, there was a noticeable difference in his performance at school. Since then, Ida has not experienced any discipline issues with her grandson. As a firm believer in God, "Thus said the Lord" is the guiding principle Ida utilizes for raising her grandchildren.

As the caretaker of three children, Ida found it advantageous to be able to discipline them and teach them "right from wrong" so they will have an understanding when they become adults. Another benefit to caretaking is being in the know. Ida's grandchildren serve as informants as they keep her updated on the issues and influences of today's generation. When deciding to take on the responsibility of caring for her grandchildren, it created a loss of freedom for Ida. For example, Ida had to make the decision to purchase a new home or provide care for her grandchildren. Ida found it difficult to manage such experiences including the caretaking of multiple grandchildren, constant court battles with her daughter, and the avoidance of gang violence. These experiences became overwhelming, causing Ida to put the building of her new home on hold in order to make the grandchildren a priority. Another disadvantage to caretaking

was the constant court battles between Ida and her daughter. Eventually, the judge awarded Ida custody of her grandchildren. Because the children have been in Ida's care since infancy, they call her mom and refer to their biological mother by her first name. The mother wants the children to acknowledge her, but the two oldest grandchildren refuse to conform. Their refusal has often times created conflict between Ida and her daughter.

**Gracie**

At age 53, Gracie and her husband are the parents of two daughters. Gracie grew up in Houston and later moved to her rural community. After graduating from high school, she entered college. Although she was able to manage the coursework, she left the university and began working fulltime. Eight years later, Gracie moved to her current residence to be closer to her family. While job searching, she completed the requirements to become a Certified Nurse's Aide but soon after accepting a position, Gracie realized that she was not suited for the medical profession. Shortly thereafter, she accepted a position in the food service industry where she is currently employed.

When Gracie accepted the position with her current employer, she began working on the production line. She was then promoted to team leader and later became a supervisor. Since serving in a supervisory role, Gracie has been chosen to participate in a series of continuing education courses centering on leadership and how to apply such strategies appropriately. For example, she has taken courses to learn how to take a more inclusive approach to management instead of delegating. Now, she is learning to include the voices of her employees instead of solely utilizing her personal ideas in decision

making. To add to these formal learning experiences, Gracie has participated in a leadership program outside of her organization which afforded her the opportunity to learn from industry leaders. Gracie also visited organizations in the surrounding area to gain an understanding of the leadership strategies that other managers employed within their organizations.

While Gracie has multiple roles, namely wife, mother of two adult children, and supervisor, she is also the primary caregiver of her three-year-old grandson. The grandson has been with Gracie and her husband since he was born. Gracie immediately assumed the responsibility of her grandson upon birth because her daughter was too inexperienced to care for him responsibly. From the time he was born, Gracie's grandson has been in the presence of adults. Gracie felt as though he needed to socialize with children of his same age. Because of this, Gracie has been diligent in trying to get him admitted into a pre-kindergarten program where he can socialize with children his age.

While Gracie's daughter is in her son's life, his father has no interaction with him and denies any ties with the child. As a result, Gracie along with her husband and sister provide the real love and care that the child needs. For Gracie, being able to provide the love, and adequate care were major advantages of being the primary caretaker of her grandson. A notable disadvantage is the stress that is endured as the caretaker. Gracie often worried about the cognitive development of her grandson. Without a professional diagnosis, Gracie expressed concerns about her grandson's attention span and wondered if he was developing properly for someone of his age and gender.

**Mathilda**

At the age of 71, Mathilda grew up as one of twelve children in a rural community in Texas. She was married for 38 years and had four children. While growing up, Mathilda and her siblings worked in the cotton fields in order to help generate income for the family. During her early years, Mathilda was able to complete both elementary and middle school grades, but once she reached high school, attendance became challenging because the nearest high school was over ten miles away from her home. Trying to balance work and walk over ten miles to school each day, Mathilda eventually stopped out of high school in $10^{th}$ grade.

Upon leaving high school, Mathilda participated in GED classes to increase her skills in English and math. Although she did not earn a diploma, she was able to improve upon her skills in the both subject areas. Following, Mathilda participated in a home economics extension program offered to adult learners through a nearby university. The home economics program included instruction in sewing, housekeeping, meal preparation, and money management. Mathilda has also participated in other religiously affiliated programs, namely, bible college, bible study, and vacation bible school.

With regard to employment, Mathilda has worked for several years in the home healthcare field, serving as an adult sitter. She continues to work in this field, but on a part-time basis caring for an elderly woman to help supplement her social security income in order to care for the children.

Currently, Matilda is the primary caregiver of four of her grandsons. The oldest grandchild is now a freshman in college. The remaining three are ages thirteen, eleven,

and ten years of age. Overall, the children perform well in school. However, at one point in time, the twelve-year-old was experiencing some difficulties with math and Mathilda enrolled him in summer school. Since attending summer school, he has demonstrated improvement in math.

Mathilda stepped in to take care of her grandchildren when the boys' parents separated and the mother could no longer provide adequate care. Often, the mother would work long hours for very little pay, leaving the children at home alone. Since the parents live out of town, the children see them only occasionally. As a widow, Mathilda relies heavily upon her sister and other family members for support in the caretaking of her grandchildren. Since they are a close family, whenever she needs assistance, the other family members would pitch in to help. Mathilda loves to raise her grandchildren in the country [a word she used to identify her rural community], and she self-identifies as a proud "country woman."

Caring for her grandchildren has given Mathilda another reason to continue living. Her grandsons are very active, and their vigor has influenced Mathilda to become more energetic. She and her grandsons engage in sporting activities and play board games. The boys also attend church with Mathilda. Mathilda noted that the disadvantage of caring for four children is the financial burden. Mathilda has faced the challenge of having to provide clothing for them especially providing the needed new clothes to begin the school year. She also has to make certain their medical records are updated and sometimes that may require a visit to a doctor which can be costly. Nonetheless, she continues to meet the needs of the children.

**Tessa**

At age 57, Tessa is the mother of five children and was recently widowed after a 35-year marriage. She was born into a family of 12 children and began working upon completion of high school. She worked in the restaurant industry as a cook for over 27 years but has now retired. Although Tessa did not attend college, she has participated in continuing education courses offered by her employers in the food service industry. While participating in such programming, Tessa has learned some basic management strategies along with various cooking techniques she applied within her organization.

Tessa has not been a stranger to tragedy. Tessa, her daughter, and her grandson were in a fatal car accident. Tessa and her grandson were transported by helicopter to a nearby hospital. Tessa fell into a coma for a short period of time and when she recovered she learned that her daughter had died in the accident. Tessa felt that her daughter was cheated out of life and wished she had died instead of her daughter. Shortly thereafter, Tessa began seeing a counselor. She had to restore her mental health since she and her husband would become the primary caretakers of her then 18-month-old grandson.

At the age of six, her grandson was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. He had to undergo brain surgery followed by several treatments of radiation. Almost a year after the surgery, Tessa's grandson had a stroke leaving him unable to walk or talk. Since completing his rehabilitation treatment activities, he has learned how to walk and talk again. However, his cognitive development has been impacted. In order to care for grandson properly, Tessa had to take some classes offered by the hospital to learn how to care for her grandson and to administer his medication properly.

Tessa's grandson is now 10 years old and attends public school that offers an inclusion program where he is educated along with students who are not cognitively delayed. Although he has made friends, he often worries about how he is perceived by the other children. For example, he developed a complex about a scar that remained after undergoing brain surgery and for a short period of time, he wore a baseball cap to hide the scar to avoid any questioning.

Given the nature of her grandson's disability, Tessa found it favorable to be able to provide the care and safety that he needs. As a disadvantage to caretaking, Tessa often worries about her grandson and how he will be treated by others, especially when he transitions into unfamiliar spaces. For example, Tessa worried about how successful he would be when navigating his new school environment. Now that Tessa is on a fixed income, there have also been some financial concerns in the caretaking of her grandson. However, with the help of her two daughters, church members, and community organizations, she makes ends meet. Importantly, she gave thanks to God because she realized her situation could be far worse.

## Summary of the Participants' Profile

Each profile provided a view into the life of each of the grandmothers along with the children in their care to help create an image of each of the families. As the primary caregivers, Jacqueline, Connie, Darlene, Lottie, and Gracie have the support of their husbands when caring for the children. The remaining five grandmothers, namely, Blossie, Kassey, Ida, Mathilda, and Tessa are single heads of household.

Regarding their education, Tessa, Gracie, Kassey, Lottie, and Jacqueline had earned a high school diploma. After becoming pregnant, both Darlene and Blossie stopped out in the ninth and eleventh grades respectively and never returned to meet the requirements to earn a high school diploma. Trying to balance work and attend school simultaneously, it became overwhelming such that both Ida and Mathilda stopped out in the 11th and 10th grades respectively. For Connie, she stopped out in the 9th grade, and because her mother did not force her to return, she also failed to meet the requirements necessary to earn a high school diploma.

Instability, underemployment, and death seemed to be the primary reasons that the children came under the care of their grandmothers. Grandmothers, like Connie, Blossie, and Kassey felt their daughters' lifestyle was too unstable to raise children. Each of their daughters was constantly moving from place to place. For Blossie and Kassey, in many instances, their daughters would constantly move about with their children in tow. Both Lottie and Mathilda pointed to underemployment as the reason for caring for their grandchildren. Their daughters were forced to work long hours leaving little time to spend with their children. Darlene and Tessa, on the other hand, inherited their grandchildren after the passing of their children. In sum, the grandmothers expressed how they had come to be the caretakers of their grandchildren.

According to Gleeson, Wesley, Ellis, Seryak, Talley, and Robinson (2009) when individuals assume the role of primary caretaker, and particularly grandparents of their grandchildren, it is useful to understand both the advantages and disadvantages to their caretaking. Thus, an account of the advantages and disadvantages noted by the

grandparents participating in this study were presented. The benefits to caretaking identified were: offering stability, providing adequate care, and providing discipline. According to Jacqueline, Connie, Blossie, and Kassey providing a stable environment for their grandchildren was an advantage. By paying close attention, according to Jacqueline and Kassey, they were better able to monitor the children's school attendance and academic performance. Being able to provide adequate care to their grandchildren was a benefit for Tessa, Gracie, Kassey and Jacqueline. When the children are in their respective homes, they are assured their basic material needs are being met. In Tessa's case, since her grandson is under her care, she can be certain that he is receiving proper medical treatment. When speaking in terms of discipline, Ida and Lottie have a greater influence on how the children are being raised since they are under their care, and that is a benefit. Ida, in particular, has raised her grandchildren based on upon "good Godly principles" so they may have an understanding of how to manage their conduct. To this point, the grandmothers have provided an explanation of some advantages to caregiving. A discussion of the disadvantages or challenges to caregiving reported by the participants is presented below.

The challenges faced by grandparents raising children are myriad. Among these participants, the drawbacks identified were: issues with discipline, stress, intrafamilial conflicts, and loss of freedom. Blossie, Darlene, and Lottie were affected by discipline issues with the children in their care. Due to Blossie's grandson's discipline problems, it was difficult for her to leave home in fear she would receive a call from the school. Darlene, on the other hand, often had to deal with backtalk from her granddaughter.

Having raised her children, Darlene was not accustomed to the disrespectful behavior towards adults exhibited by her grandchild. Because of this, Darlene did not view caretaking as advantageous. In contrast, Lottie struggled with trying to balance knowing when to be a disciplinarian and when to be lenient with her granddaughter. Grandmothers, that is, Tessa, Gracie, and Lottie frequently stressed over matters concerning the children in their care. Tessa in particular, often worried about the health status of her grandson. Since he was both a cancer patient and stroke victim, she admitted to having sleepless nights whenever he would become ill. Likewise, Gracie expressed concerns about her grandson's cognitive development. When making a comparison, she worried if he was developing at the appropriate rate for a child of his age and gender.

The grandmothers in the study were often confronted with interfamilial conflicts or disagreements existing between them and other family members. For Lottie, her children and other grandchildren had become jealous insisting that she showed favoritism towards the child in her care. This sometimes created tension among the family members. Likewise, Ida's daughter had become resentful because the children referred to her as their mother. This created a division between Ida and her daughter. Also, their mother, Ida's daughter, would often times take her to court to try and get the children, in the end, the judge ruled in favor of Ida. Despite the challenges they faced, the grandmothers in the study continued to provide care to their grandchildren. To manage their challenges, the grandmothers often turned to their religious beliefs or their spirituality.

In sum, a rich description representing the life of each of the grandmothers and their experiences as caregivers were presented. These descriptions offered an understanding of the dynamics of the grandparent-grandchild dyad. In expanding the research, gaining an understanding of the human capital and social capital development was essential to the overall findings of the study. More importantly, the learning experiences were shared from the perspectives of Black women. In the following paragraphs, through their personal narratives each of the women offered their experiences.

In regards to human capital development, the findings were organized into four themes, namely, formal learning experiences, motivation to learn, informal learning experiences, and transfer of knowledge and skills. There were five subthemes that also represented the findings, and that is, personal development, career advancement, faith literacy learning, PTA meetings, and self-directed learning. Under the heading of social networking and learning, there were four themes identified that highlighted the participants experiences including, micro support systems, macro or community support systems, social networks as avenues for knowledge construction, and application of learning for caregiving. The subthemes identified were: non-profit organizations, governmental services, educational programming, insider connection, name dropping, personal inquiries, education, healthcare, and behavior. Table 2 was developed for the purpose of highlighting the findings of human capital development, networking, and learning among the participants.

Table 2

*Human Capital Development, Social Networking, and Learning*

| | **Themes** | **Subthemes** |
|---|---|---|
| HCD | Formal Learning Experiences | |
| | Motivation to Learn | Personal development<br>Career Advancement |
| | Informal Learning Experiences | Faith literacy learning<br>PTA meetings<br>Self-directed learning |
| | Transfer of Knowledge and Skills | |
| Social Networking and Learning | Micro Support Systems | |
| | Macro or Community Support Systems | Nonprofit organizations<br>Government services<br>Educational Programming |
| | Social Networks as Avenues for Knowledge Construction | Insider connection<br>Name dropping<br>Personal inquires |
| | Application of Learning for Caregiving | Education<br>Healthcare<br>Behavior |

*Note:* HCD=Human Capital Development

While a chart has been developed to offer a snapshot of the findings, a thick description of the participant's human capital development and social networking and learning experiences are presented.

## Human Capital Development

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defined human capital as a system of lifelong learning, starting from institutions of learning in a childcare setting, to compulsory learning environments, to learning in the workplace, to more informal learning environments like civic association meetings (OECD, 2001). Moreover, the learning acquired can be used in exchange for social, political, and economic development. As a result, human capital theory was a framework utilized here as a way to understand the education and training experiences among Black grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren in rural communities. More specifically, the grandmothers were asked to give an account of their learning experiences, and many of them discussed these experiences in both formal and informal learning environments. The following section highlights human capital development in terms of four distinct themes, (a) formal learning experiences, (b) motivation to learn, (c) informal learning experiences, and (d) transfer of knowledge and skills.

### Formal Learning Experiences

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) posited that formal learning environments may include independent adult education organizations, where learning is designed with the adult learner in mind, and educational institutions where forms of post-secondary and corporative extension service learning are provided. Furthermore, when individuals are part of formal learning activities, oftentimes, the learner is embarking upon such undertakings for the purposes of certification or credentialing.

When the women who participated in this study reflected on their experiences in continuing education programming, Jacqueline, Connie, and Kassey noted that they took part in learning programming that prepared them for the caretaking of patients who are mentally ill. For instance, Connie's learning experiences prepared her to serve in the role of a teacher to the patients. She commented,

> I had to work with people that were very low. I had to take classes that fit the description of my job. During the different trainings, I had to learn how to teach them to be more independent….teaching them how to bathe themselves. I had to learn how to communicate with them…. some feeding... Sometimes the classes would take us about two weeks to do.

Similarly, Kassey participated in courses that allowed her to manage a patient's behavior more appropriately. She commented,

> The PMAB (Patient Management of Aggressive Behavior) training taught me how to handle patients when they sometimes get out of control. I learned how to restrain them when they get out of control without hurting them. You have to go back and take some more of these classes every now and again.

As professionals in the food service industry, Gracie participated in leadership training programs while Tessa learned strategies for food preparation. Gracie, for example, has taken courses that offer the skills needed to be more effective in her role as a manager. She expressed,

> I took a lot of Rich Olgaltree courses. The courses teach mangers how to deal with their employees. I took courses in diplomacy and tact.… leadership. I did a lot of these classes. Me and a few other co-workers took the classes…

When Lottie engaged in professional development forums, oftentimes the studies were centered on behavior and classroom management training. Lottie commented,

> I been an aid for about 21 years, and we had to go to a lot of behavior management trainings. We go to sessions on peer pressure and how to work with students dealing with the pressure. Every so often, we take classes to learn how to handle behavior especially when students have outbursts.… to keep things from getting out of control.

Periodically, Darlene enrolled in courses in the areas of building maintenance and services as a way to stay well informed of the intricacies of the job. Darlene informed,

> It seemed like it was always something new coming up…a new product and new way of doing things…anything. We had to take class to learn how to clean up. If something new was to come out, we had to learn how to use it. We took classes to learn how to fill out certain papers if we needed to order some more stuff. When you get to mixing around with all different chemicals, anything can happen. You gotta learn how to protect yourself. Took a class for that too.

In most cases, upon completion of the training, the women were issued certificates demonstrating they had reached a certain level of mastery. Here, the participants made apparent their engagements in various forms of continuing education programs. According to Jacqueline, Darlene, and Gracie, their participation in such programming

contributed to their advancement into either a management or leadership role within their organization. For the other women, by participating in continuing education courses, they have become more effective in their respective professions. Apart from continuing education, there were other adult learning programs in which the women participated.

Examining their human development more closely, the women acknowledged forms of post-secondary programming that also were important parts of their learning processes. A few of the participants, like Gracie and Jacqueline, attended a college or university for a period of time. Coupled with their higher education experiences, these women had taken part in coursework to become certified as nurse's aides. Jacqueline shared,

> Once I finished school, I left home and went to Homer Business College. I did not graduate. I got pregnant and married. After being married for a while, I took some classes to be a Certified Nurse's Aide. And I became a Certified Medical Assistant. I didn't go to nursing school. I could have that just wasn't the road I chose to take.

While these women were afforded the opportunity to further their education through college, Ida and Mathilda stopped out and were unable to complete the requirements to earn a high school diploma. In an attempt to earn high school equivalency, Ida began participating in night school and later enrolled in a General Education Diploma (GED) program. Ida remarked,

> I don't have too much of a sketch in education. I went to elementary school, and I went to high school. I went up to about the eleventh grade, I believe. Been on my own since I was about 15 or 16 years old. I tried to go night to school, but I quit going. I started taking GED classes during the day.… had to stop. I did not have a car. Trying to go to work and go to class on a bus was very hard. I always wanted my education, but it just didn't turn out that way for me.

Likewise, upon entry into a GED program, Mathilda began studying the math and English segments as initial steps towards earning a diploma. Along with this learning experience, she and several other women within her community participated in programming where they received home economics training taught by instructors from a nearby university. Mathilda stated,

> When I first started school, it was no buses…had to walk. Where I was from, school went to the ninth grade, and we had to come to the city to go to high school. We had to take time out to pick cotton and that kind of slowed us up from going to school. When you had to work…you had to work. Wasn't no telling your momma and daddy what you wasn't gonna do. When we did go, we had to walk over ten miles to school. I went for a little while and dropped out in the tenth grade. I took some math and English for the GED, but I did not finish though. I believe I could have passed. There was a lady who came to our neighborhood and taught us some home economics training. She was from Hamster University. She taught us different things like how to keep house, sew, and budget our money.

Based on their responses, there appeared to be a broad variety of learning experiences among the women, with college education being the highest level of education attained. Although, in some cases, the requirements for course completion were not satisfied due to various situational barriers, the skills the women acquired added to their existing knowledge thus helping to improve upon their human capital development.

In this section, an outline of the formal learning programs utilized by the participants was presented. When considering the participants' experiences as learners in such programs, it was also essential to understand their reasons or motivations for participation. To this end, the grandmothers' motivation for learning is highlighted in the following paragraphs.

**Motivation to Learn**

The impetus to participate in adult education programs or specific learning activities may be influenced by internal and external factors. When expressing their motivation for program participation, there were two subthemes that supported these findings: (a) personal development, and (b) career advancement.

**Personal development.** Their decision to partake in adult learning activities was not influenced by external factors; instead, the women were fulfilling their personal desires to increase their knowledge for the purpose of personal development. For example, Gracie enrolled in a program aside from her employer that offered leadership training to individuals who held supervisory roles within their organization. Although there was a fee along with meeting other requirements to become part of the program,

the undertaking of this experience was powered by her personal aspirations to become more effective in her role as a production manager. She advanced,

> When I participated in a leadership program, I just wanted to see how other managers were running their business. When I took these classes, it was after work. This was just something I wanted to do. It was about 23 people who took the class with me and everybody worked at different places.

Alternatively, Mathilda wanted to become more proficient in English and math and in order to fulfill that need she enrolled in a GED program. Mathilda expressed,

> I just wanted to finish. Even though I didn't get to finish [the GED], it was just something in me to try to keep going. Just wanted to learn more math and English. The learning was great.

Tessa enrolled in a culinary program to explore new ideas in food preparation and to gain skills that could be utilized in both her the work and home environments. She commented, "I just wanted to learn different things that I could use at my job and at home while I was cooking for my family." Paying close attention to the words utilized, these women used terms such as "I just wanted to," "it was just something in me," or "I just wanted to learn." Essentially, such terminology translated into these participants satisfying their personal desires for learning instead of fulfilling the requirements of an employer or for reasons of promotion. While personal development was significant to some, the ability to advance in one's career was also an important factor.

**Career advancement.** When individuals participate in adult learning programs, the credentialing can help during times of promotion or increase the chances of being

considered for a higher-level position. The women who participated in this study viewed engaging in learning opportunities as a step towards advancement within their organizations. For example, Jacqueline and Kassey understood the usefulness of workplace program participation as they witnessed how the experience attributed to their colleagues becoming promoted. In Jacqueline's case, her coworker helped her to see more clearly the benefits of program participation and encouraged her to take part. She imparted,

> I saw advancement with a lot of people at the job. I had a really good friend. She was a White lady…she would always tell me that I needed to go as far as I could. She would always say, 'Jackie you got the skills to do these jobs, now.' I never will forget, she would always tell me that I had what it took to do the job. So, I started taking the certification classes.

Sharing a similar sentiment, Kassey saw the courses as a bargaining chip when vying for positions in the workplace. She admitted, "Many of the classes you had to go to. When you participate in some of the programs, it helps when you want to move up sometimes." Connie recognized the earning potential of becoming certified to administer medication, and, therefore, began taking prerequisite courses as a step towards satisfying the requirements. Although the prerequisite courses were centered on nurse's aide programming, this served as a pathway to become certified to administer medication, which offered an increase in pay. Connie offered, "I wanted be a medication aid to get more money. To do that, I had to get some experience as a nurse's aide. That's what I did. I took the classes." Based on the responses, the women witnessed firsthand the

positive effects of program participation on one's career development, and therefore, participated in adult learning programs. Two of the women (Darlene and Lottie) engaged in programming for the purpose of meeting the demands of their employer.

In this section, I presented the motivating factors for program participation in formal learning environments as offered by the women who participated in this study. The impetuses for participation included personal development and career advancement. In order to develop a broader scope of the learning among the participants, their informal learning experiences are also documented in subsequent paragraphs.

**Informal Learning Experiences**

According to Schugurensky (2000) informal learning in many cases occurs outside of a formal environment where the learning is not engaged in for credentialing purposes. Instead, the intended outcome is awareness that certain skill sets have been attained. The dominant subthemes depicting the informal learning spaces as presented by the caretakers were: (a) faith literacy learning, (b) Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and (c) self-directed learning. The caretakers shared their narratives that included the three components.

**Faith literacy**. The term *faith* has multiple meanings, as it honors the beliefs and practices of the participants. In this research, *faith literacy* has been described as the ways in which individuals become literate in their faith. Moreover, worship service and communities of learning were faith-based learning activities in which many of the women often participated, and much of the learning occurred in their place of worship. Therefore, to understand the impact of informal learning, it is important to understand

how worship service and communities of learning impact the adult education of the participants.

A large number of participants, explicitly, Connie, Jacqueline, Mathilda, Lottie, and Gracie held the position that worship service attendance was a primary source for them to become more literate in their faith. During the worship service, the pastor was looked upon as the most learned as he engaged the congregants, and through the dissemination of information the women learned how to utilize the messages as a form of spiritual guidance when they were away from their place of worship. Mathilda commented, "It is something that I always done…going to church. When the pastor is preaching, you have to sit and listen to what he is saying. It'll help you along the way in life." Gracie further accounted, "I have to go to church on Sundays to hear the word. It helps me to get through the week especially with the things that I deal with on my job." By engaging in the worship service, the women were learning through lecture and were able to apply the teachings to their personal lives.

Although the experiences from worship service helped the women to become literate in their faith, studying scriptures within communities of learning was also a means for learning that was identified. For the women who participated in this study, these communities of learning included bible study, Sunday school or bible class, and vacation bible school. For example, when Lottie, Ida, and Mathilda attend weekly bible study sessions they read and discuss chapters in the Bible as a way to understand the scriptures more clearly. Lottie postulated,

> See, I go to bible study. When you there, you can ask questions about certain things that you may not know about. Now, if they good teachers, they can explain the scriptures to you.

Likewise, Mathilda viewed bible study as a way to make meaning of the scriptures through group interaction and follow up from the facilitators. She exclaimed,

> Most of the time when I go, bible study is Wednesday nights. It is a group of us that comes…some members from the choir and their husbands, me, and a few more people. We just sit around and read scriptures to try to find out what they mean. The pastor or one of the members teach the class. Like last week, we read Job…really, really, big discussion about him….talked about how God blessed him. The pastor or somebody always helps us to figure out some of this stuff. When I miss bible study, it's like something missing.

Engagement in Sunday school or bible class is a community learning activity that Gracie, Ida, and Mathilda participated in on a weekly basis. The learning often coincides with the following worship service and the knowledge gained during the study session guides them when they are interpreting the sermon. Ida imparted,

> I really go to bible classes. They are Sunday morning before worship service. At bible class, a member from the church is the teacher like a deaconess. We usually discuss a topic from our Sunday School book, and we talk things out amongst ourselves and we ask each other questions. The deaconess mostly explains if we have any questions. But, we have a good time. If you know the answer, you can just tell it to the other members. We like a family just trying to learn the word.

Similar to bible class, Gracie attends Sunday school where she can develop a clearer understanding of the scriptures. Like Ida, the learning often times prepares her for the teachings that are presented during the worship service. She indicated,

> I try to go to Sunday school on a regular [basis]. In Sunday school, there is someone teaching the class who may know the teachings of the Bible really well. They usually lead the class. The men are separate from the women. We have discussions in groups about different verses in the Bible. It is usually kind of what the pastor is going to talk about during the worship hour.

Additionally, Mathilda participates in Bible College—a program offered by the leadership in her church and as part of the curriculum, the learners read and study scriptures as well as develop skills to prepare them to go before large groups and teach biblical principles. She added,

> I take Bible Training University. It's like Bible College. These classes teach you how to give information before large crowds. Like, we learn how to go before people and teach the word of God.

Regarding vacation bible school, Gracie, Mathilda, and Kassey participate in such programming during the summer. Since there is a limited amount of activities offered within her community, Kassey finds attending vacation bible school to be enjoyable and a way to pass the time. She harkened, "This place gets too boring in the summer time. So, me and the kids go to vacation bible school just to have something to do around here." Through their participation in such literacy engagements, it has helped the women to develop as learners. Activities such as worship service, reading and studying

scriptures in communities of learning (Sunday school, bible study, vacation bible school), were activities that contributed to the women developing as learners through faith-based activities.

The composition of the adult learning programs was similar in nature where a church leader serves as the facilitator of the corporate learning process. There is full integration of group engagement and the learners negotiate meaning through participation as they critically examine scriptures. Individuals in the group that may be more knowledgeable provide supplemental guidance as the communities of learners attempt to draw meaning from the scriptures. A major difference in the make-up of such programs is the period of time in which the activities occur. Another medium for learning that was recognized was Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings.

**Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings.** According to Putnam (1995), for several decades PTA has been a source for civic engagement. The women admitted by participating in PTA meetings, they were able to learn for their development and the development of the children in their care. For example, participants, namely, Darlene, Ida, Connie, and Jacqueline expressed how their learning evolved through their involvement in PTA meetings. The women attended meetings in order to become more educated on policies and procedures that were put in place at the school attended by the children under their care. Connie recognized the importance of PTA participation as it allowed her to become more knowledgeable about the guidelines and procedures established for the school that her grandson attended. She indicated,

> I participate in PTA meetings, so that I know what is going on during the school season and what is expected of us. You know, if I can't go, I send his mother. I give her my car to borrow.

Darlene and Jacqueline attended PTA meetings to become educated on the timetable of events like the issuance of report cards, testing, and days of operation, and to avoid receiving information from the children that might be misleading. Darlene commented,

> You just can't trust nothing these youngsters tell you. They will tell you anything just to get out of something. When you go to the meetings the teachers can tell you when certain things that are going to happen and the dates to kind of prepare you.

For Ida, participating in PTA meetings was a method to learn how to safeguard the children against principles or teachings that countered her religious beliefs. She rationalized,

> You have to go to these PTA meetings. If you don't, you will have some problems on your hands. You have to go over to these schools and find out what's going on. You have too. The people running things could be telling your children anything. They could be forcing things on them that you don't agree with, and that is not of the Lord.

Furthermore, her attendance served as a way to gain an understanding of the children's academic performance and to become familiar with the members of the faculty and administration. In lay terms, these grandmothers attended PTA meetings in order to learn how to navigate the system for the sake of the development of the children in their care.

Over time, through their ongoing participation, it has given them the opportunity to learn the interworkings of the system governing their children's education. Another form of informal learning identified by the grandmothers was self-directed learning.

**Self-directed learning**. The participants noted that their learning, knowledge, and skills were not only acquired through formal instruction or from information obtained through other people, but also acquired through a mode of self-teaching or learning-as-you-go. Through this type of learning, the grandmothers developed skills for the purposes of survival and to enhance their performance within the work environment. In terms of this kind of learning, Blossie, Ida, and Lottie shared their reflections.

For example, as single head of household and raising her children on a marginal income, overtime, Blossie learned to steward her finances and because of this, she is able to make her money last until she is awarded more. Now that she is raising her grandchildren, she is able to apply similar financial management skills in their caretaking. Blossie rationalized,

> From raising my own kids, I learn how to make my dollar stretch. I learn how to make my money last til I can get some more. Really, it ain't how much you make it's how much you keep. I have to make the money I do have work for us.

Similarly, while working as a teacher's assistant with children who are hearing impaired, Ida learned sign language proficiently in order to communicate more effectively with the students. Also, by emulating the behaviors of the lead teachers, Ida also learned to apply other teaching strategies to aid in the development of the same students. Ida noted, "Most of my training came by learning-as-you-go. I learned how to

work with the deaf by watching the teachers…. working with the deaf, I picked up on sign language pretty good."

In her spare time, Lottie learned how to solve math problems of advanced level, and by learning the strategies, she is able to assist the students better during their tutoring sessions.

> I learn from teaching myself things. I get the books and the worksheets from the junior high school teachers and the high school teachers to try and work through the lesson to help me and the students. I make copies of the worksheets and work the problems on my own. Sometimes the teachers will send the key. I use that mostly for checking my answers.

The skills the women acquired were through self-teaching or learning as they engaged in specific activities, and although the knowledge gained did not receive a stamp of approval through credentialing, it has shown to be viable in the human development of these women. As the participants shared their experiences in the context of informal learning, the dominant subthemes that emerged were, faith literacy learning, PTA meeting participation, and self-directed learning. The underscored subthemes served as a conduit for opportunities of informal learning to occur.

In sum, learning is an integral component of the caretaking process and the knowledge and skills the grandmothers have come to know through their formal and informal experiences can be passed on to the children in their care for their continued development. Given this information, the skills the grandmothers transferred to their children for their development are highlighted in subsequent paragraphs.

**Transfer of Knowledge and Skills**

The formal and informal learning described by the participants served as a catalyst for understanding how the grandmothers were able to transfer learning to their children. Participating in forms of faith literacy programming was a commonly used source among the participants for transferring skills to their children for their development.

Turning to the process of knowledge production and dissemination, since the women were able to increase their knowledge through faith-based training and development, it was discovered that many of them utilized such practices when teaching their grandchildren. Oftentimes Lottie and Kassey had their children read scriptures aloud followed with explanations as a way to improve upon their reading and comprehension and to help them with their phonics. Lottie commented, "I have her sit at the table and read the verses out loud. So, if she has some trouble, I can help her say the words correctly. She can sound it out." Gracie, on the other hand, read biblical stories that are written in a simplified version for children to her grandson to help develop his ability to focus. She imparted, "I read the stories to him to help him focus. I need him to learn how to focus more on things or to show some interest." As a way to help develop his skills of call and response, with prompting, Gracie pointed to pictures from the stories and had her grandson provide a description. Similarly, Ida and Mathilda used scriptures as a tool for discipline as they served as reminders to the children of how to behave when they are inside and outside of the home. Ida reported,

> They always say, 'Oh Granny, you old fashioned.' I still lays it on them and say, 'thus said the Lord.' That is really my life. I still lay the word on them, you know. They need to have these scriptures on their mind and heart to behave themselves in and out of the home.

Mathilda, Lottie, and Kassey have taught their children various prayers. For instance, they have specific prayers they recite before bed and others before eating. Mathilda, in particular, has also taught her children various Bible verses. Before eating, they recite a prayer then a verse from the Bible from memory. By teaching the children to memorize prayers and Bible verses, it helps them to develop their ability to retain and regurgitate information upon request. Through the teaching of prayers, their children learn to increase their faith through their dependency on God.

Along with increasing their spiritual development, the grandmothers utilized reading and studying of scriptures and prayer to help improve upon skills including, reading and comprehension, pronunciation, call and response, behavioral management, and the ability to retain information. While some of the grandmothers utilized faith-based programming to develop and enhance their children's learning, Jacqueline and Connie drew upon the skills they acquired as participants in continuing education programs to help with their grandchildren's learning.

As mental health professionals, both Jacqueline and Connie were trained to teach patients with mental illnesses in progression or developmental stages as a way for them to grasp certain concepts. Similarly, the women have been able to apply such training in the caretaking of the grandchildren. For instance, Jacqueline employed some of the

learning strategies she acquired to help increase her grandson's reading ability. She began with very basic learning skills such as identifying specific vocabulary words and gradually moved to higher-order reading strategies like sentence structuring. Connie also taught her grandson how to become more independent in caring for his personal needs. For example, she began by teaching him to brush his teeth and wash his face with very little support or prompting and overtime he has become more independent when attending to his personal needs. Now, at the age of six, he is able to prepare a small meal without Connie's assistance. These grandmothers demonstrated how they applied the learning they have acquired in the caretaking and development of their grandchildren.

Drawing from both formal and informal learning, these grandmothers have shared their experiences as adult learners. The differing points of view have provided a window into the learning experiences of the grandmothers and how their learning has been significant in the development of the grandchildren in their care. While continuing to understand the learning among the grandmothers within the study the focus now shifts to understating how social capital and networking have contributed to their learning and caregiving.

## Social Networking and Learning

Historically, Black women have learned to become catalysts for stabilizing the Black family, especially during times of hardship and despair (Gibson, 2005). Furthermore, Black women have often served as a system of support for other Black women and their families. Black grandmothers continue to be called upon to stabilize the family when biological parents are unable to provide adequate care and in their

caregiving, they become drawn to networks of support from which they rely upon. Importantly, through social and networking systems, they become learners as they acquire knowledge and skills that are beneficial to their development, as well as the development of the children in their care.

To facilitate their caregiving, the women have systems or networks of support at the micro-level (family, friends, and so on) and the macro-level (community) on which they rely for their development and for the caretaking of their grandchildren. The social networking and learning that exists among the caregivers are outlined below in the following sequence: (a) micro support systems, (b) macro or community support systems, (c) social networks as avenues for knowledge construction, and (d) application of learning for caregiving.

**Mirco Support Systems**

Focusing on a more central system of support, these grandmothers identified individuals, namely, a combination of family members, church members, pastors, and friends whom they counted on to assist in the caretaking of their grandchildren. The support came in the forms of advice, financial assistance, babysitting or personal caretaking, and moral support.

For example, Barbara, Connie, Gracie, Mathilda and Lottie looked to their sister(s) for support. Gracie stated, “My sister helps me a lot. She helps me take care of him…babysits…feeds…and bathes him. He loves her to death.” Following, Mathilda highlighted the support she received from her sisters. She explained, “My sisters. We are on the phone all the time. I thank God for them….closeness. If I need something…my

sisters is a guarantee." The family pitches in. They give me money, and I ask them questions about my grandson in college." Prior to passing away, Ida's sister helped in the caretaking of her grandchildren. She recalled,

> My sister, before she passed, I did not have to ask she would just give to me and these children. She was so crazy about the kids…. 1000 dollars each so they could get the iPad things… just a giving person.

While Connie shared similar sentiments about her sister, she also looked to the paternal grandmother for assistance. She added, "I will talk with his other grandmother… She plays a big part in his life. He stays up there with her from time to time if I need to work or during breaks."

Other women namely, Jacqueline and Tessa received support from their daughters. Tessa confessed,

> My two daughters come over and help me out a lot with him. They help me to take care of him, especially when I ain't feeling too good....whatever I need. Now my son's, they won't do it. They are not like the girls.

As for Lottie, Blossie and Kassey, they mentioned having a best girlfriend who they could rely on. Blossie explained,

> I can call one of my girlfriends who is raising her grandchild and get advice. If I need 20 or 30 dollars I will call her. I don't ask for big money, but if I need 20 or 30 dollars she will help me. And I do the same for her.

Many of the women also acknowledged other women in the church who provided support. For instance, Lottie reported, "I ask different ones about certain

things, but you can't ask them everything you know how some church folks can be sometime….nosy." Mathilda reported, "The church helps. Since the children are different ages, they help me a lot by letting me know what is going on and how to handle certain things." For Tessa, the women from church often provided food. She accounted, "My church members come by with food to make sure me and my grandson are eating." Both Darlene and Blossie gravitated to other women who were raising their grandchildren. Darlene explained, "One of my friends is keeping her grandchildren, and we talk. She lives right down the road here."

It is important to note that while the efforts of the male figures like husbands and pastors were not ignored, many of the grandmothers looked to other women for support including their sisters, daughters, women in the church, best girlfriends, and other women who were also raising their grandchildren. Through their interactions with such groups, these grandmothers have become drawn to a wider society of support within their rural community.

**Macro or Community Support Systems**

Given the disparities in rural communities, it may be difficult for residents to gain access to needed resources, especially residents who have unique needs like Black grandmothers raising their grandchildren. Their role as primary caregiver sometimes requires the grandmothers to gain access to services that extend beyond meeting their grandchildren's basic material needs. In understanding their lines of outreach, the grandmothers identified support services that existed within their rural communities, including, non-profit organizations, governmental services, and academic programming.

**Non-profit organizations.** In many instances, non-profit organizations may take on the charge of helping to meet the needs of individuals under unusual circumstances like rural residents. Non-profit organizations namely, MAS's House, City Mission, Do Gooders, and Ron's Angels were recognized by the women as systems of support within their community. MAS's House is a help center developed from the coming together of several churches in the area to provide financial assistance for rent and utilities, address food insecurities, and to provide gently worn clothing to residents that are in need. For instance, Blossie utilized MAS's house when she needed assistance with her utility bill and the organization provided her with the funding. She reported, "MAS's House. I had to go there when I needed help paying my bill. Couldn't let my lights get cut off." While Blossie utilized funding resources from MAS's House, Kassey acquired some gently used clothing for the children. She stated, "I went there and got the children some clothes. I got them some nice stuff especially the younger ones."

The City Mission provides services to include shelter for the homeless, a food bank, rent and utility assistance, spiritual counseling, family counseling, psychological counseling, and medical assistance. When asked, Mathilda recalled how she was able to benefit from the services provided through the City Mission. She reported,

> I don't get food stamps or anything like that. I go to the City Mission and get some of the goodies. I get some of the free groceries….get vouchers to get clothes for me and the kids. The Mission gives us beans, and noodles, and I know how to put it together to make a meal. Sometimes they give us macaroni and a piece of meat…just depends.

For Ida, the City Mission provided the financial support needed to pay her utility bill. She imparted, "I went over to the City Mission to get help with my power bill….300 dollars. I was caught off guard, really."

Do Gooders is an organization that supplies families with groceries during the month of December so they may enjoy the Christmas holidays. By utilizing the services offered through Do Gooders, Mathilda was able to provide food for her family during the holiday. She admitted,

> For Christmas, I signed up with Do Gooders….to pick up some things up for my grandchildren at Christmas. You know, they help low-income families during the holiday….hams, bags of groceries, and fruits and things…They help make Christmas better.

Ron's Angels is a faith-based non-profit organization developed to provide services to families whose children have been diagnosed with cancer. Tessa utilized the services to help in the caretaking of her grandson. She stated, "They help me to take care of my grandson…. my utility bills…parking at the hospital…medication." Importantly, while all of the participants may not have utilized the services, apart from the women mentioned, Lottie and Jacqueline were aware of the non-profit organizations within their community.

**Governmental services**. Governmental support services was another system of support recognized among many of the grandmothers including, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Each of these governmental services

existed within the grandmothers' communities. Darlene admitted to having utilized multiple governmental services offered within her community to help in the caretaking of her granddaughter. She explained,

> I did use WIC. I don't know how I would have made it if it wouldn't for WIC….you milk, cereal, juice, eggs, cheese, and beans. She drank so much milk. I got Medicaid too. I really needed that because the doctor's visits were so very expensive and with Medicaid I did put braces on her teeth.

Blossie utilized the financial support offered through TANF along with Medicaid. Although Blossie recognized the usefulness of the services, she also informed me of the stipulations that came with being a recipient of TANF. She explained,

> I use Medicaid. TANF never give you enough. But you have to make it last. They will always take back. They will give…one month…the next month…back. Anything can trigger them to take something back. If their father pays 50 dollars in child support…take 100 dollars' worth of food stamps away.

For Gracie, she utilized the services offered through Medicaid and WIC in order to provide food and medical treatment for her grandson. She maintained, "I use the Medicaid services so that I can take him to his doctors' visits. He also gets WIC. WIC is a nutrition program….provides foods like milk, cereal, peanut butter, beans, and tortillas." Gracie also mentioned the CHIP program as she understood that her grandson would need the healthcare support once he aged out of other governmental programs. Both Tessa and Kassey admitted to having used both Medicaid and food stamps. Kassey explained, "I don't need food stamps the children do. They need it."

Here, the women referenced governmental services offered in their communities and shared their experiences as consumers. The services they were most familiar with were WIC, TANF, Medicaid, and CHIP. While many of the women referenced governmental services, others discussed the educational programming offered within their community.

**Educational programming**. Educational programming was another community resource acknowledged by the participants. Such programming included afterschool academic services, tutoring, summer school, and Headstart programs. At least four of the women namely, Jacqueline, Lottie, Darlene, and Tessa acknowledged the educational services offered in their community. For example, Jacqueline sought out tutoring services to help her grandson improve upon his reading. She reported, "So, in other words, instead of me trying to do the tutoring, I hired a tutor for him. She was coming on Tuesdays and Thursdays to do the tutoring with him." Darlene utilized both tutoring services and summer school programming to help increase her granddaughter's academic performance. Darlene explained "I used tutoring the school offered…paid for services from a pastor and his wife…paid for summer school. Even when she didn't need to go I still sent her anyway." Both Lottie and Tessa were knowledgeable about afterschool programs that provided tutoring services within their community. Through her enrollment in afterschool programming, Lottie's granddaughter was able to get additional help with her homework assignments. Lottie explained, "I use the afterschool program. Over there, she is able to go there and get help and get her work done. They put work in her book bag so I can keep helping her when she gets home." Since Tessa's

grandson has a cognitive disability, he also receives help from tutors in an afterschool program. She explained,

> A bus comes to the school and gets him...the center….has a disability they have people there who can help him with his homework and who can help him with different things. He likes it being around kids his age and not me all the time.

Unlike the women mentioned previously, Gracie's grandson was much younger and because of this, she had knowledge of education services centering on pre-kindergarten programming.

The grandmothers who participated in this study acknowledged the support services in which they were familiar. They called up non-profit organizations, governmental services, and educational programming. Therefore, clearly, in order for individuals to take advantage of specific resources, they must be made aware of the innerworkings of systems making learning essential to the capitalization on materials or resources available within the community. To this end, the knowledge and skills the women acquired through networking opportunities was further examined.

**Social Networks as Avenues for Knowledge Construction**

When learning to access services, the women described networking systems including, having an inside connection, name dropping or name calling, and personal inquiries. Through such learning experiences, the women were able to develop their knowledge base in order to access the needed resources within their community. The women also reported by having access to an insider, it gave them an advantage when learning how to navigate the bureaucracy existing within an organization.

**Insider connection.** Knowing an insider may give individuals leverage when understanding the "know how" or techniques to gaining access to certain services. Importantly, the insider has intimacy with the day-to-day operations of an organization or institution, and that knowledge can be transferred to an outsider. From bridging a connection with an insider, the women were able to learn step-by-step processes put in place by the institutions holding the resources they needed.

For Gracie, the interaction among church members drew her closer to an informant who was knowledgeable of the particulars of the pre-K program within her community. From their interaction, Gracie was able to take away pertinent information that was helpful to her grandson's admission into the program. Moreover, Gracie's informant taught her the skills needed to be convincing to the powers that be. She explained,

> When I finally got to talk to Sister Winnie about the preschool program, she told me what paperwork I needed to get him into the program….not to use my income just use my daughters… just in case they need to do a home visit to make sure my daughter was at the house.

In Blossie's case, during her visit to the emergency room, the women whom she engaged in conversation were nuns who were able to place her in contact with other holy sisters that had ties to various organizations that offered support to individuals needing assistance with medical bills and other resources. Paying attention to Kassey, she knew a friend of a friend who worked for the Department of Human Services. Because of the association, Kassey was privy to undisclosed information, and this made it easier for her

to utilize the most appropriate language when requesting services that were often hidden from the public. She reported,

> One of my girlfriends knows someone who works over there [Department of Human Services]. She helps me with all that. I don't wanna beat the system. But I have to know what to say when I go down there. And she'll like tell me word for word what to say and what to hold back. Shucks! You wanna be respectable about doing it, but they make you take the ugly route with the rules and stuff. I take the ugly route.

In view of Lottie's experience, it was about timing. The insider was able to provide her with the most appropriate time to submit an application in order for her granddaughter to be admitted into an afterschool program. Such planning enabled Lottie to be placed at the top of the list for admission consideration. Lottie explained,

> First, I heard the students talking about it cause some of them go to the afterschool program. It goes up to the twelfth grade. By it being free, you have to sign up early. One of my granddaughter's teachers is a good friend of mine. When I talked to her, she told me the right time to sign my girl up.

In Ida's case, her granddaughter served as a liaison. Through her volunteering efforts, her granddaughter had developed a rapport with the director of the City Mission. The preexisting relationship made it easier for Ida to get the needed funding to pay her utility bill without the questions that would invade her privacy. She imparted,

> With her playing sports and all she volunteered at the City Mission and she knew the director real good. My grandchildren have been able to bring back

information to me and then I go check things out. By my granddaughter knowing him, I was able to go over and get my bill paid.

Grandmothers, namely, Ida, Blossie, Gracie, Lottie, and Kassey were attached to insiders or individuals with the inner workings of institutions that could offer them needed services. While these grandmothers shared the methods by which they managed the organizational bureaucracy, other grandmothers learned to use the technique of name-dropping for entry into spaces where they could reap benefits.

**Name-dropping.** Name-dropping can be identified as an urban colloquialism for using a person's name as a way to gain affiliation with powers outside of their social circles. Name-dropping can help individuals who are trying to navigate unfamiliar terrain, bypass such entities as gatekeepers, and to obtain preferential treatment. Some of the grandmothers utilized this modus operandi when accessing services for their development.

Being able to recall someone's name in order to access resources was beneficial for the women. Both Darlene and Tessa were able to reference the name of their grandchild's teacher and were able to access services. Darlene maintained,

> My granddaughter needed some counseling. Her momma and daddy is the cause of it. Her daddy been in prison and is on dialysis now. When her momma got out of prison, she thought she was gonna come back for her. She came and got her little brother and left her here with me. All of this has messed with her. I never will forget…teacher found this counselor for us to go to. A friend of the family. When I called over there, I told him who I was and gave him the teachers name,

> and he told me when I could come in. He never did ask any questions. He was a lot of help.

Similarly, Tessa was able to meet directly with the founders of Ron's Angels and was given the opportunity to articulate her needs directly instead of having a third party to deliver her message.

> By me knowing his teacher, it made it easy for me to connect with Barron and Wendy. One day my daughter called…wanted to meet me….they met us at McDonalds....and told me that they would step in and help…grandson….six years old at the time…

Since developing a relationship with a neighbor, Ida was led to a judge that headed a behavior program that was not widely publicized within her community. Upon arrival to the office, Ida offered the name of the neighbor, and the judge began making plans to assist her.

Ida recounted,

> I got help with a judge and all in this town when that boy got off track. I knew this woman who knew the judge, and she told me to tell him that she sent me….judge worked right along with me. I remember when he came and got him and took him to the camp. He was faced with things that really goes on in life when you act up. When they came and took him me, and his sister cried. I knew he needed the discipline.

Here, in this process of name-dropping there were two avenues of learning identified. First, the women learned the effects of such application. That is, by dropping the name

of the sending person they were able to bypass many of the barriers that would ordinarily prevent someone from advancing into social fields that were unfamiliar and that offered goods or services they needed. Secondly, when drawing a direct connection to those holding the resources, the women became more knowledgeable about the services that were available for their taking. Such knowledge added to their personal information bank for future references. Another form of learning described by the women was through personal inquiry.

**Personal inquiries.** Through personal inquiries, researching and questioning those who may be knowledgeable of specific subject matter, the women learned various skills that helped them access services within their community. Much of the personal inquiries were centered on learning to access services offered through governmental or non-profit organizations.

Since Tessa was unfamiliar with the Department of Human Services, she had limited understanding of the services they provided and the application processes. Through the utilization of the computer along with the help of her daughter, she became more knowledgeable about the various programs and how to apply for assistance. Tessa recounted,

> My husband was a truck driver. He made good money. I never had to really use the City Mission. Never had to get on food stamps. When my children were coming up, I never had to get housing. Never had to get Medicaid. My husband carried them on his insurance. I never had to use any of it not nothing until my

> grandson got sick. Me and my daughter went on the internet and found out the assistance we could get for him. We filled out the application online…

Mathilda, on the other hand, asked several individuals about the intricacies of accessing services offered by the City Mission. The more information she gathered, the more she became confident in her decision to apply for the services the organization offered. Mathilda expressed,

> I learned how to get into the program by asking around. Many people told me I needed to bring the children's ID cards and things and what I needed to tell them. When I got there [the City Mission] I told them how long they had been with me, and I showed them proof that I had them…The man looked over my paperwork and gave me some of the little goodies and a voucher to buy clothes with.

When learning to apply for governmental assistance, Darlene asked her co-workers and many others about the formalities when applying for services. The advice, the group members provided, made her better prepared in her approach when requesting services. Darlene shared,

> By asking my co-worker and some other ladies they told me the papers that I needed to take with me when I go down to get the Medicaid. They told me what to expect and the process that you have to go through. They told me to be careful cause some of the people can be real nasty. I already knew how bad they try to treat you. Luckily, I had already had the social security card. Her momma was sorry. By raising her grandkids, my co-worker showed me all the papers that I need to fill out.

Through personal inquiry, the women learned how to utilize the governmental services offered in their area to their advantage. To add, the guidance they received helped them to become better equipped when making a request for needed services. For instance, some of the women referenced specific documentation needed for verification purposes and organizational processes that they became knowledgeable about through personal inquiry. Importantly, the use of technology and face-to-face encounters helped the women research the processes they would go through to obtain services.

The participants utilized tools in their learning process including an inside track, name-dropping, and personal inquiry, in order to create the link needed to possess services that were outside of their realm of association. The way in which these women applied their learning for the caretaking of their grandchildren is further examined below.

**Application of Learning for Caregiving**

As these grandmothers assumed the role of primary caregivers, the learning they acquired influenced how they were able to provide for the children in their care. When recalling their experiences, the grandmothers identified the ways in which they were able to apply their learning for the development and caretaking of their grandchildren. The three common subthemes centered on (a) education, (b) healthcare, and (c) behavior.

**Education.** Beyond meeting the basic material needs, attending to the educational needs of the children in their care was also part of the caretaking process. From their learning, the women were able to support their grandchildren's academic progress. Much of the academic support centered on supplemental programming in the

context of tutoring services. Importantly, as a result of their social networking experiences, the women were able to access tutoring services to help with their grandchildren's learning. For instance, since Lottie's granddaughter was admitted into the afterschool program, she was able to receive some assistance with her homework, and particularly math. For Jacqueline, by accessing tutoring services within the community, she and the tutor were able to work collaboratively to help her grandson improve his reading skills. Similar to Lottie, Tessa was able to find someone to assist her grandson with his weekly homework assignments. Since her grandson was to transition into a new school setting, she also received assistance in helping him to become acclimated with his new environment.

Since they were met with some challenges when assisting the children in their learning, the women sought other avenues of support. The women claimed how accessing tutoring services within their community helped in the academic progress of the children in their care. While securing services that helped to promote their grandchildren's education, many of the women also gained access to healthcare support services, which allowed them to better care for their grandchildren.

**Healthcare.** Being able to provide adequate healthcare to their grandchildren appeared to be a concern for some of the women. By learning to access resources resting within their community, the grandmothers were able to secure funding sources that helped to absorb the cost of healthcare. The healthcare resources were offered through either governmental services or non-profit organizations. Securing healthcare resources allowed Blossie and Kassey to afford the treatments when their grandchildren were seen

by a doctor. With the support of Ron's Angels, Tessa was able to afford the treatments, medical supplies, and other provisions needed to care for her grandson.

By bridging the connections to individuals outside of their networking systems, the grandmothers were able to secure adequate healthcare for their grandchildren. These resources were garnered through governmental agencies or non-profit organizations. While these women sought out healthcare funding sources to assist in their caretaking, others acquired services that helped to improve upon their grandchild's behavior.

**Behavior**. There were grandmothers who experienced some behavioral problems with the children in the care. The children's issues with behavior had a negative impact on their academic performance. By accessing behavior modification programming, the women were able to help improve upon their grandchild's behavior and in turn increase their academic performance. For example, when Ida was able to gain access to a behavior management program, she was able to help her grandson improve upon his behavior. Similarly, Darlene sought some counseling services for her granddaughter to help ameliorate the emotional issues that she was experiencing as a result of not having her parents in her life.

After learning to access services within their community, the participants were able to apply such teachings in the caretaking of the grandchildren. The areas in which the children seemed to benefit most included education, healthcare, and behavior modification programming. Here, there is interconnectedness between caregiving and education, healthcare, and behavior programming. Education, healthcare, and behavior were integral components of the caretaking process for the women in this study.

Importantly, such caretaking moved beyond meeting the basic material needs of food, clothing, and shelter.

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities to understand how they learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. The data was analyzed in three parts including, caregiving, human capital development, and social capital and networking. With regard to caregiving, a case story was developed for each participant identifying family and educational history, a description of the children and how they had come to be in the care of their grandparents, and the advantages and disadvantages to caretaking. Furthermore, Black feminist theory will be interwoven into the findings to help acknowledge the *Black experiences* of women.

For human capital development, the findings revealed four distinct themes which included, (a) formal learning experiences, (b) motivation to learn, (c) informal learning experiences, and (d) transfer of knowledge and skills. When expressing their motivation for program participation, there were two subthemes that supported these findings which included: (a) personal development, and (b) career advancement. The dominant subthemes depicting the informal learning spaces as presented by the caretakers were: (a) faith literacy learning, (b) Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and (c) self-directed learning.

With regard to social networking the data revealed five themes within the research, namely, (a) micro support systems, (b) macro or community support systems, (c) social networks as avenues of knowledge construction, and (e) application of learning for caregiving. The subthemes identified were having an inside connection, name-dropping, and personal inquiries.

In drawing upon the participants' experiences as Black women, participation in continuing education programming offered through their employers contributed to their human capital development. The women's experiences surrounding continuing education programming confirmed that by engaging in such learning activities, it can serve as a contributor to women and particularly Black women advancing within the workplace.

In the past, religion and spirituality seemed to be significant in the lives of Black women and continues to be evident among the grandmothers in the study. Throughout the research, the women often expressed how they turned to their religious or spiritual beliefs to help manage the challenges they experienced and to honor God for the blessings they received. Through their participation in informal learning environments, namely, worship service, and faith-based learning communities (bible study, Sunday School bible class, and Vacation Bible School) they were able to develop and increase their cognitive abilities thereby contributing to their human capital development. When living in a rural community, the Black church can serve as a primary source in helping to promote Black women's learning and development. The participants also expressed how they were able to apply the skills they acquired through faith-based literacy learning

in the caretaking of their grandchildren. The grandmothers utilized reading and studying of scriptures and prayer to help the children improve upon such skills as reading and comprehension, pronunciation, call and response, behavioral management, and the ability to retain information.

Paying attention to micro support systems, the grandmothers looked to other women for support including their sisters, daughters, women in the church, best girlfriends, and other women who were also raising their grandchildren. Non-profit organizations, governmental services, and academic programming were identified by the women as the most prominent macro systems of support offered within their communities.

The findings also suggested that networking was essential to Black women's learning especially those living in a rural community. For many of the women, by developing a relationship with an insider or someone who was familiar with the daily operations of an organization, it gave them an advantage when learning how to navigate the bureaucracy existing within an organization in order to access certain resources within their community. In addition to having an insider connection, being able to call out someone's name was also essential to the women's learning and development when acquiring certain resources within their community that may be considered hidden treasures. Moreover, being able to draw from the knowledge capital of someone outside of their common social circles afforded the women opportunities for upward mobility. The knowledge and skills that they garnered from these networks helped the women

acquire services that contributed to the education, healthcare, and behavior management of the children in their care.

As noted previously, for decades, Black grandmothers have been the first to be called upon to inherit their grandchildren when the biological parents can no longer provide adequate care. In their personal narratives, the ten grandmothers provided their perspectives of their learning in the context of caregiving, human capital development, and social networking. Moreover, their narratives served as personal testimony to their commitment to caretaking after making the decision to become mothers for a second time.

# CHAPTER V

# SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. This study sought to examine the learning opportunities and social networking that existed among the grandmothers when accessing resources within their rural community.

The literature review began with an overview of the historical and legal context of kinship care, the dimensions of kinship care in the context of the Black family, and the passing of the Kinship Care Legislation. When further developing the literature review, the social and political issues existing within rural communities were documented. To help round out the review, bodies of literature exploring the concepts of both formal and informal adult learning along with the theories of human capital development, social capital, and Black feminist thought were included.

The theoretical frameworks chosen for this study was comprised of three constructs: Black feminist thought (Collins, 1990), social capital theory (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000), and human capital theory (Cote, 2001; McClenaghan, 2000; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2001). Black feminist thought helped to examine the formal and informal learning among Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities for survival. Becker (2002)

outlined five components that help to identify human capital including, knowledge, information, ideas, skills, and health of individuals. Similarly, a report published by the OECD (2001) defined human capital as a system of lifelong learning starting from institutions of learning in a childcare setting, to compulsory learning environments, to learning in the workplace, to more informal learning environments like civic association meetings. In sum, both sources identify with formal and informal learning as major components that comprise human capital development.

Putnam (2000) identified three types of behaviors that influence social capital building which included: bonding, bridging, and linking. So Putnam explains, bonding can be identified as relationships that are established among members of homogenous groups. Bridging can be referred to as the relationships that are established with friends, associates, and colleagues as a way to establish systems for networking purposes. Finally, linking is necessary for individuals of different social strata to gain access to other individuals who have power, wealth, and social status as a way of "getting ahead" (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). In defining social capital, Colman (1988) made reference to the information transacted between family members and among individuals within a community as a form of social capital. Lin (1999) defined social capital as individuals engaging in interactions or networking with the intent to gain some benefit from the engagement. These frameworks served as a guide when interpreting or making meaning of the experiences of ten Black primary caregiving grandmothers who lived in a rural community. The specific research questions for this study were:

1. How do Black primary caregiving grandmothers residing in

rural communities develop human capital?

2. How do social networks contribute to the learning and development of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities?
3. How do caregiving grandmothers utilize the knowledge and skills acquired from human and social capital in the caretaking of their grandchildren?

The basic interpretative qualitative research design was used for the study because it allows for a union to form between the researcher and the participant as a way to make meaning of the phenomenon of Black grandmothers raising grandchildren in more recent times. Since there were multiple participants, there was a likelihood that multiple realities or viewpoints would emerge from the informants giving way to a more inductive process, which is one of the strengths of qualitative research (Martens, 2005). As a result, the application of qualitative inquiry was essential as it best supported the probing necessary to explore the phenomenon under study.

The participants were acquired through purposive sampling techniques (Merriam, 2009). To engage in the study, participants had to meet certain criteria, (a) self-identify as African American women, (b) be the primary caregiver of their grandchildren, and (c) reside in a rural community. In a face-face interview process, ten grandmothers were asked to respond to 25 semi-structured interview questions developed according to the information collected during the examination of the literature (Merriam, 2009). At the permission of the participants, the interview was digitally recorded, and the data were transcribed within a 24 hour period of the interview. The data were analyzed utilizing Creswell's (2003) six step method, namely, (a) organizing and preparing the data for the

analysis process, (b) reading through the transcripts in their entirety to generate meaning, (c) developing a narrative passage or charts that represent the findings from the analysis, (d) implementing a coding process where data is segmented, (e) continuing the coding process where the segmented data is organized into themes or categories, and (f) giving meaning to the interpreted data. As members in marginalized groups—Black, female, and for some low-income, and elderly, the participants made known their experiences as primary caretakers of their grandchildren.

## Summary of the Findings

The findings were situated in the domains of caregiving, human capital development, and social capital development. In the caregiving domain, the findings revealed some telling information about the background and characteristics of both the grandmothers and the grandchildren in their care. More specifically, a rich description of both their family and educational history were presented as well as a description of the children and how they had come to be in the care of their grandparents. An explication of the advantages and disadvantages to caretaking was also presented.

It was important to note the background information the women provided seemed to defy many of the stereotypes often describing grandparent caregivers namely, low literate, poor, single heads of household, and caring for grandchildren due to parent's addiction to drugs. For instance, many of them had participated in some form of adult or continuing education programming and had, therefore, acquired some skill sets from their learning experiences. Moreover, drug addiction was not the primary reason for caring for their grandchildren. Instead, death, residential instability, and issues with

employment seemed to be the primary reasons. Another revelation worth mentioning is that at least half of the women were married. Whether married or single, the women appeared to be strong leaders within their household.

For human capital development, there were four themes that closely described the learning experiences among the study participants. The women identified with various forms of formal learning with college being the highest level of program participation. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), there are various forms of formal learning in which one can engage including forms of post-secondary education, to cooperate extension programming, to learning environments where skills are acquired for the purpose of increasing revenue within an organization. The authors further noted, that, more and more formal learning environments are becoming populated with non-traditional students or adults like grandmothers caring for their grandchildren. Also, their motivation to participate in formal learning seemed to be significant among the women. When developing a broader understanding of their training and development, the women also shared their experiences as participants in more informal learning environments. Furthermore, the knowledge and skills the grandmothers were able to transfer to their grandchildren for their development seemed to be an integral component to the caretaking process. As a result, they shared their experiences. Additionally, two subthemes, including personal development and career advancement, were identified under the thematic heading—motivation to learn. Under the thematic heading of informal learning experiences, the subthemes including, faith literacy, PTA meetings, and self-directed learning were recognized.

Paying attention to social networking and learning, there were four themes that were identified. For the participants, the micro-support systems that were most significant were their sisters, daughters, women from the church, and best girlfriends. In regards to macro or community support systems, the grandmothers acknowledged such resources as nonprofit organizations, governmental services, and educational programs. When developing the skills needed to access resources within their community, the women utilized various networking systems as avenues for knowledge construction. Moreover, the knowledge and skills the women acquired through networking, they were able to apply in the caretaking of the children. Under the theme of social networks as avenues for knowledge, there were three subthemes that were identified which included inside track, name dropping, and self-directed learning. For the theme of "application of learning for caregiving," there were three noticeable subthemes, namely, education, healthcare, and behavior.

## Discussion

By placing the experiences of Black women and more specifically Black primary caregiving grandmothers at the nucleus, it helped to inform the literature on how they acquire human capital and the networks they engage as residents in a rural community. As part of the Black experience, the participants also informed how the knowledge they developed and acquired assisted in the caregiving of their children. Furthermore, in the discussion, Collins' (1986) concepts of interlocking nature of oppression, self-definition and self-valuation, and Black women's intellectual traditions are utilized to help contextualize the grandmother's experiences.

**Interlocking Nature of Oppression**

According to Collins (1986) Black women have long been affected by the interlocking systems of race, class, and gender oppression. While Collins speaks of racism, sexism, and classism as forms of subordination often experienced by Black women, classism seemed to be most common form of oppression among the participants. Many of the participants were of low-socioeconomic status and relied upon the services of governmental agencies and non-profit organizations for support. According to Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1996), Black women are often negatively impacted by societal issues of racism and sexism and they generally live in impoverished conditions. Conversely, the respondents did not acknowledge race discrimination when sharing their experiences.

Similarly, when Alfred (2007) explored the economic development of Black former welfare recipients, the study participants did not identify with race discrimination as a barrier to their economic development. Instead, the former recipients viewed poverty and the stigmas associated with welfare as barriers to their development. Alfred mentioned that many times individuals are not able to identify with race discrimination and, therefore, rename their oppressive experiences as something other than racism. For the grandmothers, when gaining access to services they relied heavily upon the knowledge of those who were in day-to-day contact with the operations of the institution of interest, or they utilized the name of someone in position of power. The information was not widely publicized. Yosso (2005) argues institutions are not designed with people of color in mind; therefore, they develop regulations that deny individuals access which

can be identified as institutional racism. Although the grandmothers did not identify with racism, they were forced to become attached to various social fields in order to acquire resources that were either withheld or a hidden treasure which seems to parallel Yosso's notion of institutionalized racism. Therefore, the interlocking systems of oppression most identifiable among the participants were classicism and racism.

**Self-definition and Self-valuation**

Collins (1986) maintained that self-definition is a personally constructed point of view that challenges the socially constructed ideas and images of Black womanhood. Importantly, such images are used as oppressive forces to control, dehumanize, and to exploit Black women. Through self-valuation, the grandmothers were able to counter the socially constructed notions of Black women as being "less than" or the "other." For example, many of the women admitted to having strong ties to their Christian principles which have helped them to reclaim their identities and become more empowered. Also, when redefining what it means to be a Black woman, it was discovered that many of the grandmothers were either diligent financial managers, creators of knowledge for survival, learners in adult education programming, and leaders within their workplace organizations. Earlier in this document, I characterized my grandmother Ida as poor, Black, widowed, the primary caretaker of her grandchildren, and having limited access to resources. The findings helped me to redefine who she was. Indeed, she was a diligent financial manager, learner in faith literacy programming, provider of religious orientation, and a creator of knowledge for survival. More importantly, despite societal perceptions, these women, along with my Grandma Ida utilized their marginalized

position as a place for resistance and triumph. Moreover, these characteristics can be identified as *strengths* (Gibson, 2005) because the grandmothers were able to apply the skills they acquired in the development of their grandchildren.

**Black Women's Intellectual Traditions**

Historically, the intellectual traditions of Black women have been devalued, and their contributions have been discredited. Paying close attention to the tradition of "othermothering" over the years, Black women have been known to serve in the role of mother within their homes, extended families, and throughout their communities (Collins, 1990). Importantly, the knowledge and skills they acquired were applied when caring for their biological children and other children within their community. The concept of "othermothering" supports the caregiving among these grandmothers who stepped in to care for their grandchildren when the parents could no long provide adequate care. More importantly, many of the women were caring for multiple grandchildren. Jacqueline, in particular, was not only caring for her grandchildren, but she was also the primary caregiver of a child whose biological mother was a friend of the family. Importantly, some of the characteristics describing these grandmothers can also be identified in Boykin (1983) nine dimensions significant to African American culture. More specifically, the dimensions that best described the experiences of these women were: communalism and spirituality.

For communalism, these women began caring for their grandchildren as a way to offer stability in their lives. Many of them were caring for multiple grandchildren or had cared for other grandchildren at some point in time as a way to keep the family together

and to prevent the children from being separated. Because of their commitment to family, they felt a sense of obligation to care for their grandchildren when the biological parents could no longer provide adequate care. Moreover, despite their situations, the grandmothers cared for their children without many complaints. For example, although Darlene was not pleased with her grand-daughter's behavior, she continued caring for her and admitted to never having any regrets for being the primary caretaker.

The findings also revealed that many of the grandmothers acknowledged their commitment to their religion or spirituality, and as a result, they utilized such teachings in the caretaking of their grandchildren. It is important to unpack the notions of religion and spirituality because many times the two concepts can become coalesced, yet they are quite different in nature. Several authors referred to religion as an organized system which helps to shape an individual's ideologies through their practices of certain doctrines or beliefs specific to that structure (Schiele, 1997; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). Conversely, Tisdell and Tolliver (2003) noted that spirituality relates to a "connection to what many may refer to as the life force, God, creator, a higher self or purpose, Great Myster, or Buddha nature" (p. 374). Furthermore, Schele (1997), and Tisdell and Tolliver (2003) agreed that spirituality is universalistic making relevant the interconnectedness of all elements of the world.

Based on the definitions provided, both religion and spirituality appeared to be significant in the lives of these women. For instance, Ida utilized biblical principles as a tool for raising her grandchildren. Both Ida and Tessa attributed their guidance and strength needed to navigate the ills and good fortunes of caretaking to God. Lottie,

Mathilda, and Gracie along with their children attend church regularly as a way to develop spiritual guidance. Connie's grandson attends a faith-based school where biblical principles are incorporated into the curriculum. Through Lottie's religious influence, her granddaughter serves as an usher and also praise dances at her church. Since days of old, religion and spirituality have been significant for women, and particularly Black women, and was found to be significant to the grandmothers in the study. When making the connection with the literature, Ruiz (2008) often referred to many Black grandmothers as women steeped in their faith and providers of religious orientation to their children and grandchildren.

According to Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, and Driver (1997), custodial grandparenting cuts across gender, class, and ethnic lines, and females, Blacks, and individuals of low-socio-economic status are twice as likely to become primary caregivers. Importantly, Black women, and particularly grandmothers, are usually the first to assume the role, and the aunt is usually the next person in line who assumes the role of primary caregiver (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994). In large proportions, literature regarding grandparents as primary caregivers focuses primarily on Black grandmothers residing in urban communities oftentimes giving little regard to grandmothers residing in rural locations (Bullock, 2004; Robinson, Kropf, & Myers, 2000). Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by providing an examination of how the caregivers in rural communities learn to develop human capital and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and access resources within their rural community. In addressing the research question, it was important to note the research questions (1 and 3; 2 and 3) were

combined in order to present a more comprehensive response. In this section, I discussed how the women used knowledge and skills from human capital and in the following section, I will address the second part of the question of how they utilized social capital.

**Research Questions 1 and 3**

1. How do Black primary caregiving grandmothers residing in rural communities develop human capital?
3. How do caregiving grandmothers utilize the knowledge and skills acquired from human and social capital in the caretaking of their grandchildren?

When learning for human capital development, these grandmothers identified with both formal and informal learning experiences. The participants acknowledged such program participation as attending a college or university, Certified Nurse's Aide programming, Certified Medial Assistant programming, General Education Diploma (GED) programming, home economics classes, and continuing education programming. A dominant message from the study revealed that for the majority of the women, the formal learning they acquired was through continuing education programming within their workplace. Although the women participated in other forms of formal learning, engaging in continuing education programs offered through their employer seemed to be central to their training and development.

In the literature Isaac (2010) and Rogers and Hansman (2004) stressed the importance of continuing education, insisting that ongoing training in the workplace can lead to promotional opportunities. Moreover, promotional opportunities can lead to salary increases, which can eventually translate into economic sustainability overtime.

Issac went on to stress that through such programming, employees are able to prepare their workers to meet the future demands of a knowledge-intensive workforce. Then, such preparation becomes a benefit to both the employer and the employee. The findings from the research indicate that for the Black women in this study, the training and development acquired by participating in continuing education programming in the workplace were essential to their human capital development.

As the grandmothers shared their learning in formal settings, others shared their informal learning experiences. For many of the women, the learning was acquired through faith literacy learning, PTA meetings, and self-directed learning. Another dominant message from the study indicated that faith-based literacy was important to the learning and development among the women. The majority of the women stated that faith-based literacy in the forms of worship services, scripture reading through communities of learning—namely bible study, Sunday school or bible class, or Vacation Bible School was significant to their learning. Many researchers have noted that faith literacy is a large part of the culture of many African Americans, dating as far back as slavery (Issac, 2010; Issac, Guy, & Valentine, 2001). As participants in worship service, the women were able to apply the teachings in their daily living. According to Schiele (1997) spirituality has long been a value held by people of African descent. Furthermore, Black women, in particular, may be steeped in their spirituality as they hold a solid relationship with the Christian faith. Moreover, their faith in Christianity has helped Black women to learn to navigate the ills of society and, because of this, they have been

able to bind the family together and move them onward during tested and uncontested times (Ruiz, 2008).

Within the communities of learning including, bible study, Sunday school or bible class, and Vacation Bible School, while there is a facilitator, there is full integration of group engagement, and the learners negotiate meaning through participation as they critically examine scriptures. Individuals in the group who may be more knowledgeable provide supplemental guidance as the communities of learners attempt to draw meaning from the scriptures. Over time, as participants in the communities of learning, the women were able to develop, as well as improve upon, their cognitive abilities.

The women also expressed how their learning evolved through their involvement in PTA meetings. They attended meetings in order to become more educated on policies and procedures, to become educated on the timetable of events, to avoid receiving misleading information, and to monitor the grandchildren's academic performance. Here the study has made evident that the grandmothers have a vested interest in the learning and development of their grandchildren. Despite their educational background, they have demonstrated a willingness to learn the "ins and outs" of the system that presides over their grandchild's education. More importantly, the women were better informed when either adhering to or challenging the system.

Through the utilization of a more self-directed (Brookfield, 2009) approach to learning, the women developed specific skills as a means for survival in either their working environments or within the larger society. For instance, overtime, Blossie

developed money management strategies as a means for survival since she was single head of household. Many low-income women are gifted with being able to raise their children and survive on minimal income. Collins (1990) asserted that historically, Black women have been creators of knowledge for survival as they have been thrust into roles calling for them to take on leadership positions within their household and in society at large. Similarly, Blossie has learned to make her minimal income stretch so that she may be able to meet the demands of caregiving on a daily basis. Her skills have developed with time as she utilized such financial management in the caretaking of her own children.

Becoming literate in their faith was essential to the learning and caretaking duties of the grandmothers in the study. In her research, Ruiz (2008) raised awareness of the active part that Black grandmothers play in the lives of their children and grandchildren. In calling attention to some characteristics, she underscored Black grandmothers' dedication to their faith and family by referring to them as "providers of religious orientation" (Ruiz, 2008, p. 64) to their children and grandchildren. As providers of religious orientation, the grandmothers in the study discussed how along with increasing their spiritual development of the children, they utilized reading and studying of scriptures and prayer to help improve upon skills including, reading and comprehension, pronunciation, call and response, behavioral management, and the ability to retain information. As Black women in a rural community, the participants turned to what was most familiar—scriptures from the Bible and prayer to help in the training and development of the children in their care. Although many of the participants expressed

possessing limited formal education, the education of their children continued to be a priority, and they utilized their religion and spirituality to contribute to the development of their grandchildren.

The findings offered a view of the human capital development among Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities. Such learning has also been significant in the caretaking of the grandchildren in their care. In summation, these findings helped to answer the questions of how Black primary caregiving grandmothers learn to develop human capital for their development and how such knowledge has been applied in the caretaking of their grandchildren. As the findings helped to bring clarification to the research questions surrounding human capital development, responses reflective of the learning pertaining to social capital development and caretaking are detailed in the subsequent writing.

**Research Questions 2 and 3**

2. How do social networks contribute to the learning and development of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities?
3. How do caregiving grandmothers utilize the knowledge and skills acquired from human and social capital in the caretaking of their grandchildren?

Social capital theory in the case of bridging, bonding, and linking of networks (Putnam, 2000), as well as information flow (Coleman, 1988), and social networking (Lin, 1999) helped to explore how social systems contributed to the learning and development among Black grandmothers raising their grandchildren in rural communities. A further examination was conducted to explore how the primary

caregiving grandmothers utilized their learning from social networks in the caretaking of their grandchildren.

The findings from this study revealed that primary caregiving grandmothers possess networks of supports at both the micro and macro levels (Simpson & Lawrence-Webb, 2009). More specifically, micro levels of support are those consisting of immediate and extended family members, friends, and associates (Simpson & Lawerence-Webb). This study revealed that much of the women's support came from other women including their sisters, daughters, women in the church, best girlfriends, and other women raising their grandchildren. Such support centered on advice, financial assistance, babysitting and personal caretaking, or moral support. Collins (1986) refers to the coming together or the interpersonal relationships that exist among Black women as a "sisterhood" (p. 22). Furthermore, such unions represent loyalty and support and are significant to Black women's culture. When women gain access to such networks, they become the beneficiaries of information, knowledge, and resources. Moreover, for women, "membership in these networks, whether they are at the individual level (family and friends) or the societal level (community groups), it is sought with the expectations of reciprocity, mutuality, and benefit for the women involved" (Nanton, 2009, p. 14).

The grandmothers in the study described macro systems most familiar including, non-profit organizations (Boy's and Girl's Club, MAS's House, City Mission, Do Gooders, and Ron's Angels), governmental support services (TANF, WIC, Medicaid, and CHIP), educational programs (tutoring, summer school, and Headstart), counseling, and behavior management. Gladston, Brown, and Fitzgerald (2009) found that when

primary caregivers were able to access support systems to help meet the needs of the children, it helped to decrease the tension existing among the grandmothers. Simpson and Lawrence-Webb (2009) maintained, given the unique characteristics of rural communities, accessing community resources is essential to the well-being of residents, especially Black grandmothers providing care to their grandchildren. Without governmental support systems, Bachman and Chase Lansdale (2005) posited, grandmothers raising grandchildren, in particular, will face continued economic hardships.

According to Nelson, Gibson, and Bauer (2010) initiatives designed to serve such populations as grandmothers in primary caregiving roles often go unsolicited as these populations are either unaware of the programs or lack the knowledge of how to gain access to the services provided. More specifically, the grandmothers in this study described how through their interactions with members in various social fields, they were able to access community resources by drawing from the knowledge of others serving as insiders, by calling out a name or name dropping, and through personal inquiries.

As Black women residing in a rural community, they mentioned how through their connection to an insider who was in close contact to the day-to-day operations of an institution or organization, they were able to learn the appropriate skills in order to secure the services they needed. Putnam (2000) used the term "linking" as a way to described how individuals of different social strata gain access to other individuals who have power, wealth, and social status as a way of "getting ahead" (p. 23). Ida, in

particular, learned to access some financial services from the City Mission. For example, through volunteering, her granddaughter had developed a rapport with the director at the City Mission. Because of that relationship, it was an easier process when Ida sought funding to pay her utility bill. Kassey "knew somebody that knew somebody" who worked for the Department of Human Services and through establishing this relationship, she learned of what information to provide and what to withhold, when accessing services. By developing a relationship with the former director of the Headstart program, Graci learned the language she needed to use, the behaviors she needed to display, and the financial reporting she needed to provide on an application. Through knowing an insider, Lottie learned of the specific time to turn in an application in order to receive preferential treatment. Having what can be identified as an insider connection gave these women leverage when learning to gain access to specific resources within their community. Given the disparities within rural communities, it is important for Black women to be able to draw from the knowledge of an insider in order to navigate various inequitable systems and to access needed resources. In the research, Yosso (2005) counters the stereotypes of communities of color by acknowledging the capital that exists in such communities. Here, the women utilized linguistic, navigational, social, and familial capital resting within their communities in order to acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. Name calling or name dropping was another avenue these grandmothers used in order to access services.

Name dropping is an urban colloquialism for using a person's name in order to navigate unfamiliar territory (Donath & Boyd, 2004). By offering the name of her

granddaughter's teacher, Darlene was able to access a counselor with immediacy. There was no extended wait time. By referencing her grandson's teacher, Tessa gained access to the founders of the non-profit organization called Ron's Angels. When Ida provided the name of the woman who referred her, the judge in their town offered his assistance. Knowing such a pillar in the community gave Ida some credibility, thus leading to her receiving some much needed services to help in the management of her grandson's behavior. Importantly, the service she received was not widely publicized. Locating this judge was a hidden treasure that may have only been garnered through social networking. Such findings parallel those of Lin (1999) who noted that when individuals become attached to social networks, there are some benefits to such attachments. To add, such networks cause information to flow between individuals who hold the knowledge to those needing to access pockets of information for upward mobility (Colman, 1988; Lin 1999). Here, it can be noted that the transaction or flow of information within a rural community is significant to Black women becoming upwardly mobile. Although the information may be transacted on a smaller scale when compared to an urban community, the benefits from this flow of information remain substantial to the learning and development of Black women living in a rural community.

With regard to personal inquiries, Tessa, Darlene, and Mathilda described how they garnered information through research and conversation in order to learn how to gain access to services within their communities. In their attempt to learn the strategies for acquiring certain resources, they relied on their personal efforts. In other words, they had to *figure it out*, if they wanted to access the resources they most desired. Collins

(1990) posited Black women historically have been forced to become creators of knowledge as a means for survival which is oftentimes created through self-reliance.

The findings from this research study suggest interconnectedness between social networking and learning among the women. Drawing from the work of McClenaghan (2000), there is a correlation between learning and social networking and in some instances, one may not occur without the other. From their ties to social fields, the women were afforded opportunities of knowledge construction in order obtain goods and services within their community.

Overall, the knowledge acquired by the grandmothers added to their personal repository which Alfred (2010b) and Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) referred to as funds of knowledge. The grandmothers were constantly adding to their funds of knowledge as they learned for their development and the development of the children in their care. As they became more experienced and informed consumers, they became better able to provide for themselves as well as their grandchildren. Moreover, such funds of knowledge are often stored and utilized in future learning experiences. The learning overtime becomes what Alfred identified as lifelong learning. Such learning was applied when attending to their grandchildren's education, healthcare, and behavior management.

By learning to access educational services within their communities, the women were able to contribute to the academic success of their grandchildren. In their study, Ferguson and Ready (2011) stated that grandparents who were college educated demonstrated higher skill levels in literacy and math and were better able to transfer

learning to their grandchildren. Ruiz (2008) and Gibson (2002a) argued that although primary caregiving grandmothers may demonstrate low levels of education, academics remained a priority in their caregiving. It was evident that the women maintained a vested interest in the academic success of their grandchildren. This supports what Gibson refers to as "answering the call" (p. 35) to caretaking, acknowledging that the children's learning is also an essential component to caregiving. From their learning experiences, the women studied here were also able to access resources within their community that offered affordable healthcare. Landry-Myer (1999) reported due to the lack of legal documentation, many grandparents caring for their grandchildren informally find it challenging to gain access to healthcare services. Therefore, by acquiring free or affordable healthcare services, the women included in this study were able to attend to the health and wellness of their grandchildren. As noted in earlier research, oftentimes children who are under the care of their grandparents experience emotional distress brought on by the abuse and neglect from the biological parents (Kroll, 2007). By learning to access community resources, the grandmothers in this study were better able to manage the behavior of their grandchildren, which led to improvements in their academic performance.

Here, the application of learning for caregiving was demonstrated through the acquisition of educational services, healthcare, and behavior programming. The scholarship has indicated that grandmothers are the first in line to care for their grandchildren when the biological parents can no longer provide care (Gleeson & Seryak, 2010); however, caregiving extends beyond meeting the basic material needs to

include such tenants as education, healthcare, behavioral programming. Despite their challenges, the grandmothers in this study were willing to learn the skills needed to acquire resources that could assist in the caretaking of their grandchildren.

## Implications for Theory, Policy, and Adult Education

Collins' (1990; 1991) Black feminist thought , the OECD (2001) human capital theory, and Coleman's (1988), Lin's (1999), and Putnam's (2000) social capital theory served as a foundation to discuss the implications for theory, policy, and adult education.

### Implications for Theory

As stated previously, overall, there is a paucity of research that calls attention to the experiences of women, and especially Black women serving as primary caregiving of their grandchildren. However, some studies recognize the experiences of this populace of women. The majority of the researches describing the experiences of Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren are usually situated in an urban context. As a result, research on Black primary caregiving grandmothers residing in rural communities is nearly non-existent within the literature. Several scholars have pointed out that the problems existing within rural communities, namely, high rates of poverty, social isolation, limited access to resources, and a significant disconnection from social networks are easily masked, thus making it difficult to call attention to the challenges existing among Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren (Kropf & Kolomer, 2004; Robinson, Kropf, & Myers, 2000; Rural Policy Group, 2009; Schoenberg & Coward, 1997).

Moreover, according to Alfred (2007) adult education literature has not fully explored the development of women, and particularly, the experiences of Black women. Therefore, the findings from this study clearly contribute to the literature as they bring awareness to development of women, and importantly, Black women within rural communities. More and more grandmothers are becoming mothers for a second time. Because of the phenomenon, this research makes a contribution by capturing the voices of grandmothers residing in rural communities and how they navigate learning and social systems in their rural communities.

Based on the findings, individuals living in rural communities are faced with such issues as high rates of poverty, social isolation, and limited access to resources and because of the misconception of idyllic living issues affecting Black primary caregiving grandmothers are often overlooked. Conversely, the implications within Collins, (1990, 1991), Davis (1981), and Guy-Sheftall (1995) Black feminist thought places the experiences of Black women at the nucleus of analysis. Moreover, the theory addresses issues of race, class, gender, and color that are significant to Black women as their lives are most often affected by such inequities (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996). In this research, Black feminist thought allowed for the framing of questions that would provide insight to understand how Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. In many cases, bodies of literature using Black feminist thought to examine the learning experiences among Black women are often viewed in a formal context. However, in this particular study Black

feminist thought is utilized to explore how Black grandmothers caring for their grandchildren learn to develop human and social capital. Here, there is a mix of both formal and informal learning experiences being studied. Therefore, in theorizing the learning existing among Black women not only was it significant to the literature to explore the specific experiences of Black grandmothers caring for their grandchildren, but to move beyond urban settings to explore the Black woman's experience in a rural context. As a result, Black feminist thought was utilized to help frame the research.

The personal aspects of human capital development laid the foundation to understand the learning experiences significant to Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities. In a report written by OECD (2001), suggest that human capital investments span the spectrum of lifelong learning, from compulsory learning, to more informal learning environments, like civic engagements. Based on the definition presented by OECD, the respondents admitted to being participants in both formal and informal learning environments for human capital development.

With regard to formal learning, there appeared to be a broad variety of learning experiences among the women, with college education being the highest level of education attained. Participants, namely, Gracie and Jacqueline, attended a college or university for a period of time. Both women had also met the requirements to become certified as a nurse's aide. Ida and Mathilda had taken courses in preparation for GED testing. However, participation in continuing education programming within their workplace seemed to be significant across participants. According to Issac (2010) when individuals are given the opportunity to participate in learning programs within the

workplace, it can lead to promotions and economic sustainability overtime. For Black women, in particular, participation in such programming was important given the poverty that is known to exist among Black women and their grandchildren living in a rural community (Bigbee, Musil, & Kenski, 2010; Korpf & Kolomer, 2004). The findings from the current research would suggest that organizations within rural communities offer more opportunities for learning and development in the workplace in rural communities. Moreover, for future research, work environments within rural communities should be studied as sites for training and development among its residents.

In adhering to the OECD (2001) notion of human capital, the primary caregivers identified informal learning spaces that were most familiar including, (a) faith literacy learning, (b) Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and (c) self-directed learning. Paying close attention to faith literacy learning, worship services and communities of learning were activities in which the women participated. Based on the findings from the report written by OECD, the implications for informal learning suggest that programming offered in places of worship is significant to the training and development among residents in rural communities. Therefore, for future research, places of worship should be further studied as sites for informal learning.

Due to economic constraints, primary caregiving grandparents in rural communities have become detached in greater numbers from needed social networks when compared to caregivers in urban communities (Bigbee, Musil, & Kenski, 2010; Bullock, 2004; Stoller & Lee, 1994) making it more challenging to locate adequate resources (Bullock, 2004; Gibson, 2005). The aspects of social capital and networking

laid the foundation for understanding how Black grandmothers raising their grandchildren learn to develop social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care.

According to Nanton (2009) when women gain access to social networks at the individual level (family and friends) or societal level (community groups) they become the beneficiaries of information, knowledge, and resources. At the individual or micro level the caregivers identified such supports systems including, sisters, daughters, women in the church, best girlfriends, and other women who were also raising their grandchildren. Much of the support came in the forms of advice, financial assistance, babysitting, or moral support. The findings suggest that when networking at the individual or societal level the caregivers were able to garner information that contributed to their development and the development of the children in their care. The flow of information between primary caregivers and other homogenous and heterogeneous group members can contribute to the human capital development among community members (Coleman, 1988). In regard to networking, the findings may suggest that there is a correlation between human capital and networking—one may not occur without the other. When the grandmothers became attached to networking systems, they were afforded informal learning opportunities. Further research may explore how social capital contributes to human capital among low-income Black women.

When learning to access community resources, the women described networking systems to include: insider connection, name dropping, and personal inquiries. Having

an insider connection seemed to be common among many of the participants. The flow of information transacted between the caregivers and the insider helped the women to navigate the bureaucracy existing within an organization in order to access needed resources. Another networking system that was most beneficial to the caregivers was the ability to call out the name of a reputable person within the community in order to gain access to services. By calling out the name of the sending person, many of the caregivers were able to bypass certain barriers. In the literature, Putnam (2000) refers to this process as bridging. In many cases, the caregivers were able to draw a connection to, or a bridge, individuals of different social strata in order to gain access to other individuals in positions of power as a way of getting ahead.

When making a comparison, urban residents may have greater access to information through various media venues; whereas, rural residents may rely heavily upon the information offered by an insider or individuals that have social influence within their community. Therefore, the implications for social capital involve a need to create more networking opportunities that enable Black primary caregivers in rural communities to broaden their knowledge base to leverage resources.

**Implications for Policy**

The Passage of the Kinship Care Legislation—"required the department of Social and Health Services to: develop a kinship search process, establish a kinship care committee, and implement kinship care navigator projects" (Tri-West Grop, 2005, p. 4). Kinship Navigator Programs were designed to: (a) assist primary caregivers in locating and accessing community resources, (b) help caregivers to learn to navigate the

bureaucracy existing within organizations when accessing resources, and (c) to help caregivers to become proactive to avoid crisis situations. The programs were essential to the development of many caregivers across the U.S. However, due to the lack of funding to support Kinship Navigator Programs, they began to diminish overtime.

Within the state of Texas, policy makers established legislation suggesting that children be placed in the care of a relative when parents can no long provide adequate care. However, lawmakers have neglected to look more closely at the unique needs of grandparent caregivers and in the contexts of licensing adjustments, school enrollment and medical consent, and payments and subsidy acquisitions as grandparents serving a primary caretaker is becoming more prevalent (Child Welfare Legislation Policy Network (CWLPN), 2013). While the Texas legislature has enacted laws that support relative care, the regulations are not specific to rural residents. Instead, policy makers have established laws that fail to recognize the differences among urban and rural residents. At the federal, state, and, local levels of government, the political leadership lacks the knowledge of how to address the unique needs of populations within rural locales and as a result, these officials make the mistake of prescribing regulations that follow an urban construct for individuals in rural communities making it difficult to address the challenges rural residents face (Rural Broadband Policy Group, 2009).

In the literature, Roberts (2002) identified three types of care established by policy makers that describe the level of care that may be provided to children when their biological parents can no longer fulfill the obligations of caretaking including, private care or kinship care, kinship foster care, and foster care. Like many of the grandmothers

in this study, the caregiving provided was identified as informal or kinship care causing some grandmothers to utilize much of their own resources in order to provide care for their grandchildren. Policies that have been put in place deny informal kinship care providers, like many Black primary caregiving grandmothers, access to needed resources in order to provide adequately for the children (Letiecq, Bailey, & Porterfield, 2008). Many times Black primary caregivers make the decision to care for their grandchildren without the support of governmental entities because some feel the process is far too invasive (Butts, 2005). Caregivers, especially in rural communities, have become a more vulnerable population and are oftentimes overlooked in policy (Bullock, 2004; Gibson, 1999, 2002b, 2005). Therefore, the creation of policies that highlight the unique needs of caregivers providing informal care in rural communities would be beneficial to the caretaking process.

**Implications for Adult Education**

Black grandmothers raising grandchildren in rural communities have become just as prevalent as Black primary caregiving grandmothers in urban communities (Simpson & Lawrence-Webb, 2009). The difference is grandmothers in rural communities are faced with unique social problems and, as a result, they have become detached from various systems of support (Bigbee, Musil, & Kenski, 2010). Based on the responses from the grandmothers in the study, forms of formal learning have occurred through learning in the workplace. Workplace learning enabled grandmothers like Darlene, Jacqueline, and Gracie to be placed in leadership roles in the workplace. Isaac (2010) reported such learning opportunities in the workplace can create economic sustainability

for individuals over time. Adult educators may be charged with helping employers to develop continuing education programs within the workplace.

Authors like Albertini (2009) suggested a partnership between adult educators and social workers to aid in the development of women in urban communities. The learning and development of the grandmothers in this study were influenced by their participation in church activities including, worship service, bible study, bible class, and prayers just to name a few. The learning also contributed greatly to the caregiving the grandmothers provided to the grandchildren in their care. Similarly, a suggested partnership between adult educators and the leadership within the Black church can also foster environments where informal learning can occur. Albertini admits the collaboration of adult educators and in this case, leaders in the church can create opportunities for women in rural communities to become more self-empowered allowing for more opportunities for social capital building.

In a report written by the Rural Broadband Policy Group (2009), it was argued that policy, geographic isolation, and demographics are to blame for individuals' (those residing in rural communities) inability to access forms of media. To add, the decaying of rural communities has forced residents like grandmothers to become more detached from community resources, makings such treasures more hidden (Bigbee, Musil, & Kenski, 2010). Given the social problems resting within rural communities, becoming more computer literate may be beneficial to residents like grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren in such communities. Access to digital information can no longer be identified as a luxury (Rural Broadband Policy Group, 2009). Adult educators may be

called upon to influence policymakers to advance digital communications or to expand adult education and workplace education in rural communities. Additionally, adult educators may be called upon to assist primary caregivers in becoming more computer literate in order to broaden their knowledge base. Instead of relying heavily upon the information provided by more narrow systems of support, they can begin to widen their network pool by drawing from the intellectual capital of individuals in the broader society through the Internet.

## Recommendations for Future Research

As previously noted, much of the literature that focuses on primary caregiving grandmothers is explored in an urban context (Rural Broadband Policy Group, 2009). Also, according to Alfred (2007) adult education literature has not fully explored the development of women, and particularly, the experiences of Black women. Therefore, this study sought to examine the learning opportunities and social networking that existed among the grandmothers when accessing resources within their rural community. However, continued research is needed in order to examine the learning among primary caregiving grandmothers and the networks in which they engage as Black women. Importantly, social network analysis of this populace of women is recommended. According to Serrat (2009), social network analysis maps and measures formal and

> informal relationships to understand what facilitates or impedes the knowledge flows that bind interacting units, viz., who knows whom, and who shares what information and knowledge with whom by what communication media (e.g., data information, voice, or video communications) (p. 2).

Additionally, a comparative study of urban and rural primary caregiving grandmothers is recommended in order to explore the networks in which the women engage within their communities. It is also recommended that a comparative study be performed to explore the role of the Black church in building social capital among residents in both urban and rural communities. Networking systems or support groups comprised of grandparent caregivers in Black churches can be a subject of study. In regards to career development, a study may be performed to examine the role of the Black church in the development of low-income women. Finally, future research may well focus on grandfathers as primary caregivers of their grandchildren in both rural and urban contexts.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities to understand how they learn to develop human and social capital to navigate inequitable systems and acquire resources for themselves and the grandchildren in their care. In Chapter I, I provided background information in order to help build a case for the topic to be explored. In building a case for the study, a statement of the problem was developed along with the purpose of the study. In order to help frame the research, social capital theory, human capital theory, and Black feminist thought were utilized. Social capital theory is the bridging, bonding, and linking of networks (Putnam, 2000), information flow (Coleman, 1988), and social networking (Lin, 1999) is associated with one's ability to gain access to pockets of information for economic stability. Human capital is a system of lifelong learning starting from institutions of learning in a childcare setting, to compulsory learning

environments, to learning in the workplace, to more informal learning environments like civic association meetings. Black feminist thought places the experiences of Black women at the nucleus of analysis in the midst of racism, classism, sexism, and ageism to instigate social change (Collins, 1991).

Chapter II began with an overview of the historical and legal context of kinship care which includes a discussion of the case of *Miller v. Youakim* (1979), the dimensions of kinship care in the context of the Black family, and the passing of the Kinship Care Legislation. Next, through research and literature, I presented a case for Black grandmothers who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren in rural communities by making relevant the social and political issues existing in such communities. Finally, I offer literature exploring the theories of human capital development, social capital development, and Black feminist thought.

In Chapter III, the methodology elements of the research were detailed. According to Crotty (2003), the methodology element of research is "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (p. 3). For this study, the methodology section was outlined in the following sequence, (a) methodological framework, (b) role and positionality of the researcher, (c) research process and design, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, and (f) trustworthiness.

In Chapter IV, I presented the research findings, giving voice to Black grandmothers raising their grandchildren in rural communities. The chapter began with a description of the two counties selected for data collection purposes followed by a rich

description representing the life of each of the grandmothers and the children in their care. Next, as each of the women gave an account of their education and training experiences, and how they were able to transfer the learning to the children in their care, these accounts are detailed. In continuation, the women shared how social capital and networking contributed to their learning and caregiving. These discussions are also detailed in Chapter IV.

Chapter V included a summary, a discussion of the findings, and the implications for research, policy, and adult education. Recommendations for future directions of research surrounding these topics was also included, as well as a conclusion to the study.

Rural communities can no longer be portrayed as settings of easy living and tranquility. While this may be true in some instances, there are some genuine social issues that exist among rural residents. When compared to urban residents, rural residents are detached from resources in greater numbers. Grandmothers continue to be the next in line to inherit their grandchildren when the parents can no longer provide adequate care. To add, more and more grandmothers are becoming the primary caretakers of their grandchildren. Indeed, grandmothers inheriting their grandchildren continue to increase while resources to support such caretaking seem to decrease, especially in rural communities. I support the call to action to address the issues existing among primary caregivers in rural communities, leading with Black grandmothers as they are the largest population of women caring for their grandchildren.

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## APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Project Title**: Learning (Program participation), Social Capital (networks, links, attachments), and Caregiving: Black Grandmothers in Rural Communities who are the Primary Caregivers of their Grandchildren

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Mattyna L. Stephens, a researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

**Why Is This Study Being Done?**
The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren in rural communities to understand how they learn for their development and the development of the grandchild or grandchildren in their care.

**Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?**
Based upon the nature of the research, individuals are being asked to participate in the study because they: (a) identify as Black, (b) are a grandmother who is raising their grandchild or grandchildren, and (c) reside in a rural community within the state of Texas.

**How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?**
Between 8 and 12 women will be asked to participate in the study.

**What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?**
The alternative to being in the study is to not be in the study.
Participation in the study is voluntary. There will be no loss of benefits or advantages that are now coming to you, or would be coming to you in the future.

**What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?**
The grandmothers will be asked to respond to each of the questions on the interview protocol. Between 25 and 30 interview questions will be presented. After each question, the participant will be given the opportunity to respond to the question. The interview sessions will be one on one.

**Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study?**
At the permission of the respondent, the interview will be digitally audio recorded.

_____ I give my permission audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

_____ I do not give my permission for audio to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

**Are There Any Risks To Me?**
There are minimal risks associated with your participation in the study.

**Are There Any Benefits To Me? (**If there are no direct benefits, this section may be omitted)***
There is no benefit to you. However, your participation in the study could inform the literature and the fields of adult and higher education on the learning among African American primary caregiving grandmothers in rural communities.

**Will There Be Any Costs To Me?**
Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

**Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?**
Yes. The participants will be given a $10 Wal-Mart gift card upon completion of the interview. The gift cards will be purchased from personal funds.

**Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?**
Both the Principal Investigator (Dr. Mary Alfred) and the Co-investigator (Mattyna L. Stephens) will make every effort to keep all the information you tell us during the study strictly confidential, to the extent permitted or required by law. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research volunteers like you. The IRB has access to study information. Any documents that you sign, tapes, or transcripts where you can be identified by name will be kept in a locked cabinet in the primary investigator's office. No information that could identify you as an individual will be used to write about or present findings from the study.

**Who may I Contact for More Information?**
You may contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Mary Alfred about a concern or complaint about this research at malfred@tamu.edu. For alternate contact or Co-Investigator you may contact Mattyna L. Stephens at msteph06@tamu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

**What if I Change My Mind About Participating?**

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your student status, medical care, employment, evaluation, relationship with Texas A&M University, etc.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

**I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want, (if applicable) and I can still receive services if I stop participating in this study. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.**

_____

Participant's Signature Date

_____

Printed Name Date

**INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT**:

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

_____

Signature of Presenter Date

_____

Printed Name Date

## APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Caregiving**

1. Please give me some background information about you and your family.
2. What is life like in this community?
3. Can you describe the children in your care? (age, sex, grades, performance in school, special abilities, etc.)
4. Thinking back how did you become the primary caregiver?
5. Tell me some of the advantages of being the primary caregiver.
6. What has been some of the challenges of being the primary caregiver?

**Education** (Human capital development (education, training, and other learning activities) among caregiving grandmothers in rural communities)

7. Describe your educational experiences starting with elementary school (elementary, secondary, post-secondary).
8. What was your motivation to engage in post-secondary education and training (if applicable)
9. As a participant in the learning activities or programs what were some of the skills that you learned?
10. How did the knowledge and skills acquired from education and training prepared you for your role as primary caretaker of your grandchildren?
11. Since becoming the primary caregiver, in what educational programs or learning activities have you participated?
12. What was your motivation to participate in the program/s.
13. How do you utilize your learning in the caretaking of their grandchildren?

**Social Networks** (Social Capital Development, social networks, community resources. How social capital networks contribute to the learning and caregiving)

14. As primary caregiver, whom do you count on for support?
15. What kinds of support do you get from these individuals?
16. What are some of the support services that are available within your community?
17. How did you learn about services and programs that may be available in your community? (e.g. What services are available, who to go to for questions, what is the language, which services are best suited for both you and the grandchild, where do you go, what is the cost…)
18. If any, what support services have you utilized or are currently using?

19. What role does family, friends, associates, and/or organizations play in you learning to gain access to support services? How have they helped?
20. How have you been able to support your grandchild in their development after learning about available programs or services?
21. Tell me about some of your past experiences when trying to get support services for your grandchild.
22. What is the hardest part when learning to gain access to these services?
23. How did you learn to overcome some of the barriers?
24. What are some needed resources that have not been available to you? Please explain.
25. Is there anything else that you would like to share?