

WOMEN AND VOLUNTEERISM IN AMERICA

By

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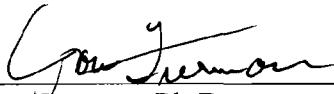
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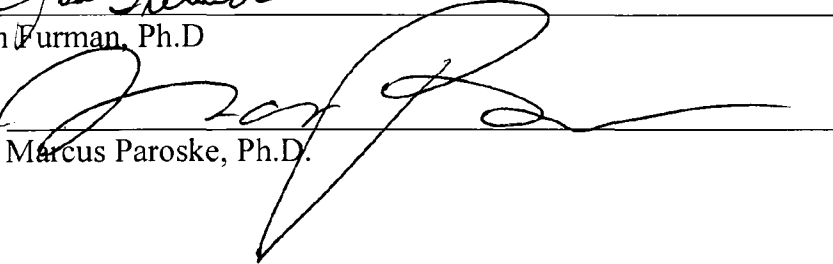
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SUMMARY

Is volunteerism an expectation of American women? Do we believe that women are responsible for the nurturing elements in our American culture? Are women, more so than men, expected to volunteer, serve, educate, protest, advocate, and organize, and do so in stereotypical gender roles? Are these ideas depicted in American media, publications, events, and organizations that are targeted at women? This thesis examines the profile of volunteers in America for the period of 2000-2010. Through the examination of American media, publications, events, and organizations that are targeted toward women over the same decade this thesis reveals that women are targeted for specific cultural cues through media. These findings demonstrate that there is an American expectation that women are responsible for nurturing a healthy public through volunteerism.

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Acquiring my undergraduate and graduate degrees and working as a professional for ten years at the University of Michigan-Flint has given me a significant amount of time to develop relationships with the faculty that are invaluable to me.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents information and research on the role of American women engaged in volunteerism during 2000-2010. In comparing the volunteerism of men and women, their varying types and levels of engagement, and stories from the field (both from volunteers and those they serve), the following is concluded:

1. Volunteering is important to the economy for social change,
2. Woman volunteer more than men because it reinforces traditional gender roles, and men are interested in personal gain,
3. Women do not generally promote their efforts as political,
4. Popular media depicts women volunteers in stereotypical gender roles and in ways that do not give credit to the societal improvements that result from their efforts,
5. Women volunteer for a variety of individual and cultural reasons.

The overarching conclusion is that women's volunteering is influenced by cultural messages.

Relevant statistical information regarding women and volunteerism is provided by reliable government sources such as reports generated by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). This is important because assumptions are made, with a cultural bias that women volunteer in ways that further reinforce traditional gender roles. In American culture, it is commonplace to see women portrayed as serving in nurturing roles that deal with the health and wellbeing of children, the poor, and the elderly. Information reported by CNCS and other sources confirms that these assumptions play out in the ways in which women actually volunteer and serve their communities.

The population of the United States of America per the 2010 U.S. Census was 308,745,538. Of that population, fifty one percent are female (U.S. Census), and how that percentage contributes to the volunteer base in America, spanning several generations, is important. Not only is it important to the field of volunteerism to gain a better understanding of why women volunteer and play a large role in volunteerism, overall, it is also important to gain a better understanding of how men engage in volunteerism.

The American government has institutionalized the concept of service in American culture with the April 2009 enactment of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (CNCS 2011). The Corporation for National and Community Service states the following about the act on its website:

The Serve America Act is landmark legislation that charges the Corporation for National and Community Service and our partners to dramatically expand opportunities for Americans to serve, to focus on critical national issues, to be a catalyst for social innovation, and to support the nonprofit sector. The law both expands our existing programs and creates new initiatives to increase service opportunities and strengthen our civic infrastructure (CNCS)

Many researchers and scholars have studied service in all forms, work which largely has been focused on the individual with the purpose of determining either how to increase volunteerism or how to measure the impact of volunteerism. While there is significant research (reviewed in this thesis) from various disciplines on the topics of volunteerism, gender, service, media and engagement, and the role of citizens in the United States, linking these ideas and concepts to explore how all contribute to American

culture is the purpose of this paper. Gaining a better understanding of how often, in what ways, and with what influences women in America have been involved in volunteerism from 2000-2010 reveals the cultural expectations of women to volunteer. Understanding how volunteerism presents in American culture is most likely of particular interest to new graduate students in American Culture and American Studies Programs or to professionals who work with volunteers and in the nonprofit and/or government sectors.

The first chapter provides insight into how volunteerism has been an important part of American culture since the founding of the American government. It also discusses how volunteers are recognized and celebrated in American culture and, further, how volunteers are critical to the nonprofit sector.

The second chapter of this paper provides a review of the literature. It also provides a foundation for the evidence that women play a specific role in volunteerism as it relates to American culture.

The third chapter demonstrates the statistical data connected to these concepts, providing further evidence of the idea that women are expected to play a critical role in the care of communities in American culture.

The fourth chapter explores the media messages that relate to this topic and demonstrates that American popular culture promotes the concept that women are expected to volunteer. It is important to note that this chapter focuses on current and mainstream publications. A good portion of the research for this fourth chapter is web-based.

The conclusion brings all of these concepts together and helps the reader gain an understanding of how government, gender associations, and media have influenced who has been engaged in volunteerism in America during the period from 2000-2010.

CHAPTER ONE: What Does It Mean to Volunteer in America?

To understand the significance of volunteerism in American culture, one must first understand its context. Volunteerism takes many forms and includes several types of action on the part of individuals and groups, and society defines the concept in multiple ways. In addition to the term “volunteerism,” there are constant cultural references to activism, community service, civic engagement, service learning, and public scholarship. Some volunteerism is generally viewed by establishments as a negative action, such as protests. Overall, it is assumed that the range of civic actions in which an individual or group may participate, from supporting and/or challenging the government to feeding the poor and hungry, collectively comprise what Americans believe to be volunteerism.

The development and signing of the United States Declaration of Independence serves as an early example of what may result because of volunteerism. In 1776, writer Thomas Paine published a pamphlet titled “Common Sense” where he made the earliest arguments in favor of American Independence. This pamphlet was distributed by volunteers in volume. This sort of voluntary action created the first American movement with volunteers at the center.

The U.S. Constitution established a culture of engagement in America. It requires majority decision-making while guaranteeing individual rights. This combination of government supporting what is desired/needed by the masses (the public), and those representing the public and their individual rights creates systems of accountability. Having such a foundation, provided the idea that the rights of the individual are to be preserved and recognized and that to do so would require the collective whole working on behalf of the individual and communities. This combination of government

representation of the people and preservation of individuals' rights to worship and free speech created a healthy tension that is still prevalent in American culture today. In such an environment, there is a consistent need for representatives of the collective to balance their influence with the needs of individuals. This representative type of government places those representing "the people" in a service role. They must advocate on behalf of the whole and serve the best interest of the community. The US Constitution established the volunteer nature of representation.

Other early examples of engagement and service to the greater community include Benjamin Franklin establishing the first volunteer firehouse in 1736 and individuals raising funds and organizing boycotts during the American Revolution.

The nineteenth century birthed civic organizations such as the American Red Cross and the United Way. The twentieth century brought service organizations such as The Rotary Club, Lions Club, and Kiwanis. Americans continue to maintain a culture of serving one another and tending to those in need. While many American presidents spoke of and promoted volunteerism throughout history, the establishment of the Peace Corps a little over fifty years ago marked the first volunteer program mandated and supported by an American president. Over the last fifty years, it has become evident that at least three Presidents placed a prominent emphasis on "being a good citizen" and performing community service. They did so through their speeches, programs, and legacies, each influenced by the political and social climate of the time. While various presidents throughout American history have reinforced the notion of engagement in American culture, there have been several Presidents over the last fifty years that have formalized their personal belief of the importance of individual service.

President John F. Kennedy took office in 1961. President George H.W. Bush took office in 1989. President William Clinton took office for the first time in 1993. President Barack Obama took office in 2009. All of these men became President at points in American history when there were economic troubles, wars occurring on foreign soil, and a great need for Americans to be reminded of the principles on which our government was founded. These men were young Presidents and shared similar philosophical beliefs and strategies. The ideology and purpose of their respective campaigns was to stir, among Americans, the sense that individuals are responsible for the direction of the country and collective action on the part of Americans will invoke necessary changes in American culture. Further, these American Presidents demonstrate by their speeches and actions that for an American to fail to rise to his calls for action would make one less of a citizen, since service is core to what it means to be American.

These Presidents all took office at times when the American people were tired of war, the economy was failing, and patriotism was low, motivating each to build platforms on the notion that service is a good and necessary American characteristic. They, each in his own way, offered an alternative view of the future where the average citizen could make significant change, end wars, restore the economy, and rely on neighbors and friends for help and support. Their visions were shared through their campaigns, the promises made in their Inaugural Speeches, and the programs, efforts, and laws they left behind as legacies of their administrations. In President Kennedy's case, that artifact is the Peace Corps program. In President Clinton's case, the legacy is the AmeriCorps Program and the notion of being the first MTV President, able to secure higher voting rates than Presidents before him. In President Obama's case, it is USASERVICE effort

and identification as the first President to effectively utilize social networking to increase involvement in the political process. In all cases, that call to service was evident.

President Kennedy founded the Peace Corps in 1961. It has been operating for over four decades and is still growing. In its first 44 years, the Peace Corps had over 178,000 volunteers serving in over 138 countries and learning more than 200 languages and dialects.

Kennedy's Presidential January 20, 1961 Inaugural Address further demonstrates these ideas:

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man... Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask us the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own (Bartleby)

President George H.W. Bush also has a legacy in the field of volunteer service. In his 1989 Inaugural Address, he made his famous comments about the "points of light," which led to a new era of volunteer management and recognition:

I have spoken of a thousand points of light, of all the community organizations that are spread like stars throughout the Nation, doing good. We will work hand in hand, encouraging, sometimes leading, sometimes being led, rewarding. We will

work on this in the White House, in the Cabinet agencies. I will go to the people and the programs that are the brighter points of light, and I will ask every member of my government to become involved. The old ideas are new again because they are not old, they are timeless: duty, sacrifice, commitment, and a patriotism that finds its expression in taking part and pitching in (Bartleby).

This address led to series of milestones in the field of service:

1989: President George H.W. Bush's inaugural address invokes the vision of a "thousand points of light." President Bush establishes the Daily Point of Light Award for individuals making a difference. The award is now administered by the Points of Light Institute.

1990: In response to President Bush's call to action, the Points of Light Foundation is created as an independent, non-partisan, nonprofit organization to encourage and empower the spirit of service.

1991: The Points of Light Foundation merges with the National Volunteer Center Network.

1992: CityCares (later named HandsOn Network) is established as a national umbrella organization to provide a national network for sharing resources.

1993: The Corporation for National and Community Service is established to connect Americans with opportunities to give back to their communities. It is directed to manage three main programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps (created by President Bill Clinton), and Learn and Serve America.

1998: The Corporation for National and Community Service, the Points of Light Foundation, and the Volunteer Center National Network join to manage three national

service programs: The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), AmeriCorps*VISTA Literacy Connection, and AmeriCorps Promise Fellows (Hands On Network)

President Bill Clinton appealed to young people through the MTV *Chose or Lose* Campaign to become engaged by voting. His Inaugural address made the point that

The American people have summoned the change we celebrate today. You have raised your voices in an unmistakable chorus. You have cast your votes in historic numbers. And you have changed the face of Congress, the Presidency, and the political process itself. Yes, you, my fellow Americans have forced this spring. Now we must do the work the session demands... To that work I now turn, with all the authority of my office. I ask Congress to join me. But no President, no Congress, no government, can undertake this mission alone. My fellow Americans, you too, must play your part in our renewal. I challenge a new generation of young Americans to a session of service- to action your idealism by helping troubled children, keeping company with those in need, reconnecting our torn communities. There is so much to be done – enough indeed for millions of others who are still young in spirit to give of them in service, too. In serving we recognize a simple but powerful truth – we need each other. And we must care for one another. Today, we do more than celebrate America; we rededicate ourselves to the very idea of America (Bartleby)

President Clinton's second Inaugural Address continued the theme of volunteerism and went further to impress upon the masses that Americans must act as one:

Beyond that, my fellow citizens, the future is up to us. Our founders taught us that the preservation of our liberty and our union depends upon responsible citizenship. And we need a new sense of responsibility for a new century. These is work to do, work that government alone cannot do: teaching children to read; hiring people off welfare rolls; coming out from behind locked doors and shuttered windows to help reclaim our streets from drugs and gangs and crime; taking time out of our own lives to serve others... Each and every one of us, in our own way, must assume personal responsibility- not only for ourselves and our families, but for our neighbors and our nation. Our greatest responsibility is to embrace a new spirit of community for a new century. For anyone to succeed, we must succeed as one America... The challenge of our past remains the challenge of our future – will we be one nation, one people, with one common destiny, or not? Will we all come together or come apart? (Bartleby)

President George W. Bush also left a legacy of service. In January of 2003, he announced the formation of the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation. The Council was established to recognize the important contributions Americans of all ages are making within their communities through service and civic engagement. Administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Council brings together leaders from the worlds of business, entertainment, sports, education, government, nonprofits, and the media (CNCS 2011).

Over the last decade, there has been a great deal of discussion and debate about the terms used to describe volunteerism in America. For the purposes of this paper, volunteer/volunteerism will be used interchangeably with other such terms that are used

in American culture. By exploring a broad range of definitions for the words, community service, activism, service learning, and civic engagement, volunteerism can serve as an overarching term to describe any and all of the above activities. While there are subtle and distinct differences in these terms, also dependent on context, volunteerism captures the spirit and general understanding of all the terms that will be explored here.

Volunteerism/volunteering is generally considered an altruistic activity, intended to promote good or improve human and community life. Volunteers sometimes serve for their own skill development, to meet others, to make contacts for possible employment, to have fun, and for a variety of other reasons. Still, volunteerism is most often associated with the giving of time and talents to a cause.

Volunteering takes many forms and is performed by a wide range of people. Many volunteers are specifically trained in the areas they serve in, such as medicine, education, or disaster preparedness. There are times when volunteers serve on an as-needed basis, such as in response to a natural disaster or for a beach-cleanup. In a military context, a volunteer army is one whose soldiers chose to enter service, as opposed to having been conscripted. Such volunteers do not work for free and are given regular pay.

Identifying the ways in which Americans recognize volunteers on a national level provides insight about how service is valued in American culture. While national awards sometimes cut across all ages, several awards target youth and women. Below are some examples of these awards, featuring profiles of the volunteers that earn them. While this is not a complete list of all of the awards for volunteerism that are offered in the United States, this list of awards does provide a clear idea of what types of service are

recognized in mainstream culture. In examining the criteria for these awards and reviewing the recipients, it is demonstrated further that, while women may be recognized in the most public ways for their service, it is almost always for their efforts serving in traditional gender roles.

2010 Do Something Awards

To be eligible for this award, an applicant must be 25 years of age or under and be a U.S. or Canadian citizen. Applicants are assessed on the following:

- Ability to identify a problem in his/her community and ways to combat it.
- Demonstrated passion and commitment to empowering the community in which s/he works.
- Ability to cultivate long-term and respectful relationships within his/her community.
- Demonstrated that s/he has directly and individually fueled the success of his/her work.
- Ability to extensively and tangibly improve the community in which they work.
- Ability to create great awareness about his/her issue or cause.
- Demonstrated confidence and enthusiasm about being a leader and change-maker.
- Possess a long-term vision for the growth and sustainability of his/her work (Do Something).

Do Something

DoSomething.org is one of the largest organizations in the United States that helps young people rock the causes they care about. A driving force in creating a culture of

volunteerism; Dosomething.org is on track to activate two million young people in 2011. By leveraging the web, television, mobile and pop culture, Dosomrhing.org inspires, empowers, and celebrates a generation of doers: young people (25 and under) who recognize the need to do something, believe in their ability to get it done, and then take action (Do Something).

Profile of the 2010 Winner

We would like to give a big congrats to Jessica Posner for winning the \$100k! We feel like a proud mother when we think about this young lady's accomplishments. Jessica hails from Middletown, CT and recently graduated from Wesleyan University just two years ago. During that time, Jessica went to Kenya and built the Kibera School for Girls through *Shining Hope for Communities*, an organization she co-founded with fellow Wesleyan student, Kennedy Odede.... In Kibera, which is the largest slum in Africa, 66% of the girls trade sex for food as early as age six and only 8% of women in Kibera ever attend school. Jessica's Kibera School for Girls is the first free school in Kibera and gives these girls the opportunity for a better life through education and employment. Jessica is giving these girls the power to live the lives they truly deserve. Congrats again Jessica! We can't wait to hear more about your accomplishments and success in the future! (Do Something).

“The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) is the leading voice on aging issues for Area Agencies on Aging and a champion for Title VI Native American aging

programs. Through advocacy, training and technical assistance, we support the national network of 629 AAAs and 246 Title VI programs” (n4A).

“n4a administers the MetLife Foundation Older Volunteers Enrich America Awards (OVEA) Program to honor both older volunteers and older volunteer programs that make our communities better places to live” (n4A).

Senior Citizen Volunteers

America's Oldest Volunteers Recognized by MetLife Foundation Enrich America Awards

The 2010 MetLife Foundation Older Volunteers Enrich America Awards were announced by the Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) and the long list of honorees – all between the ages of 59 and 95 – were honored at a ceremony in Washington D.C.

The award winners in this eighth year of the program were selected by a "blue ribbon panel," and recognized in three categories:

- Champion, which honors those who use their time and talent to make their community a better place to live;
- Mentor, which recognizes older volunteers who are devoted to working with young people and their families; and
- Team Spirit, which pays tribute to older volunteers who assist older adults.

The top award recipient in each category is recognized as a Gold Honoree:

Barbara, 78, and Ira, 79, Smith of Acton, Massachusetts earned top recognition in the Community Champion category. Barbara and Ira launched Household Goods Recycling Management (HGRM) in their garage in 1990. HGRM is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization that accepts donated household goods and distributes them free of charge to individuals and families in need.

What started as a plan to help one family has grown to an organization of 300 volunteers that now helps close to 4,000 families a year make a home. The Smiths continue to serve as volunteer co-executive directors of HGRM.... In 2009 alone, HGRM collected and distributed more than 31,000 pieces of major furniture, kitchen, medical, bedding and baby care items as well as 11,000 boxes of smaller household goods, free of charge. Because of the Smith's hard work and dedication, HGRM is now the largest provider of direct household assistance in New England (n4A 2011)

YSA (Youth Service America)

“[This organization] improves communities by increasing the number and the diversity of young people, ages 5-25, serving in substantive roles” (YSA).

The Harris Wofford Award, presented by Youth Service America and proudly sponsored by State Farm Companies Foundation, were established in 2002 to honor former Senator Harris Wofford, one of our nation's greatest public servants and long-time board member of Youth Service America. Following Wofford's goal of "making service and service-learning the common expectation and the

common experience of every young person in America," the awards recognize extraordinary achievements in four categories: Youth, Organizations, Media, and Public Officials. Based on my contribution to engaging youth to involve in community services, I was selected to receive the Harris Wofford Youth Award in 2010, the highest award Youth Service America gives to one youth each year. I founded a 501(c)3 organization with my younger siblings and we have engaged youth in 10 countries and 70 US schools. I have created service, leadership, and education opportunities for youth and have helped 14000 kids recover from 5 natural disasters including the current disasters in Japan - project ongoing. Over the past three years, I have organized numerous fundraising activities and raised \$40000 funds for the disaster victims and educational programs and collected over 7000 items for the victims. For more details, please visit www.wecareact.org.... The mission of We Care Act includes helping young disaster victims to recover and engage youth around the world to help others in need. The organization helped the earthquake victims in Sichuan, China, the hurricane victims in Galveston, Texas, poverty students in a remote mountain area in Hunan, China, and help raise funds for autism research. This organization has recruited more than 24 groups around the world, including youth and children from China, Canada, Singapore, and the USA (YSA).

President's Volunteer Service Awards

The President's Council on Service and Civic Participation (the Council) was established in 2003 to recognize the valuable contributions volunteers are making

in our communities and encourage more people to serve. The Council created the President's Volunteer Service Award program as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service.... On December 7, 2010, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) hosted a luncheon to honor 18 Presidential Volunteer Service Award recipients for their volunteer work under the John Ogonowski and Doug Bereuter Farmer-to-Farmer program.... One honoree, Mrs. Lue Jolly, is a Family Resource Management Program Leader with over 30 years of experience managing and administering food and nutritional programs at universities, state agencies and military bases. Mrs. Jolly completed her first Farmer-to-Farmer assignment in March 2010 in Food Safety Management in South Africa. The assignment focused on sharing best practices in food safety and hygiene, nutrition and new recipe development (CNCS)

L'Oreal Women of Worth Award

She sees a need around her and doesn't hesitate to get involved. She empowers women, mentors children, helps survivors to heal and advocates for seniors. As a leader, she encourages and coaches others to make a difference in their community. Discover their stories ... and be inspired to create your own. In 2007 Michael Davis lost his life while serving his country in Iraq. At a mere 21 years of age, Taryn Davis became a widow. In the wake of this tragedy, Taryn began to discover that resources were scarce for young military widows. To reach

out and support other young women who had lost a husband in service, Taryn began The American Widow Project-AWP (2010 Honorees).

According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, the American Red Cross is the largest (per net assets) human service nonprofit in the country. Examining how volunteers serve the American Red Cross is essential to understanding how national nonprofit organizations factor volunteers into their operations and sustainability plans:

The American Red Cross is where people mobilize to help their neighbors—across the street, across the country, and across the world—in emergencies. Each year, in communities large and small, victims of some 70,000 disasters turn to neighbors familiar and new—the more than half a million volunteers and 35,000 employees of the Red Cross. Through nearly 700 locally supported chapters, more than 15 million people gain the skills they need to prepare for and respond to emergencies in their homes, communities and world (American Red Cross).

Some four million people give blood—the gift of life—through the Red Cross, making it the largest supplier of blood and blood products in the United States. And the Red Cross helps thousands of U.S. service members separated from their families by military duty stay connected. As part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, a global network of 186 national societies, the Red Cross helps restore hope and dignity to the world's most vulnerable people. Ninety-six percent of the workforce of the American Red Cross is comprised of volunteers. According to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, 58% of the volunteers in the “Americas” are women (American Red Cross).

Another example of the one of the largest and oldest nonprofits in America is that of the United Way. In 1888 the **Charity Organization Society of Denver**, later known as the United Way, was formed to serve as an agent to collect funds for local charities, as well as to coordinate relief services, counsel and refer clients to cooperating agencies, and make emergency assistance grants in cases which could not be referred. Today the United Way is still mobilizing the caring power of communities and making a difference in people's lives.

Women volunteers created a special place within the United Way. Over a decade ago, the United Way Women's Leadership Council was formed in communities across the country. Created and led by women, United Way Women's Leadership Council's mission is to:

"Mobilize the power of women to advance the Common Good in our communities."

Further, the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, reports that women are more likely to give and give at a higher amount across most income levels. The establishment of the United Way Women's Leadership Council further demonstrates that women are placed in volunteer roles that roles that nurture communities and that they are front and center as volunteers in US organizations.

CHAPTER TWO: A Review of the Literature

Volunteering, serving, and advocating, is an expectation for American women. In today's society, as in the past, women contribute incredible effort in the service of others. Unfortunately, women are rarely portrayed in American mainstream media or recognized in national venues for their contribution.

About 26.8% of the American population volunteered for different purposes during 2008 and 2009 (Bureau of Labor). This number marked a significant trend of people increasingly volunteering in America. Texas alone reported a volunteer number of 4.6 million people who were mostly involved in AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, and Senior Corps (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Volunteers in the United States, consistently contribute approximately \$169 billion of the annual income (Zillmann 100).

Women account for 31% of all volunteers. Even within the reporting of volunteers, the contribution of women volunteers is hidden. According to national statistics, parents volunteer more than other subpopulations. Thirty-five percent of volunteers are parents. It is not reported how many of those parents are women. Further, baby boomers are reported to comprise 29.8% of all volunteers. Again, these statistics are reported without acknowledgment of how many of those baby boomers are women.

According to a report by the Bureau of Labor in 2010, more women volunteer than men, and they account for more than 30% of the volunteer population. These numbers are consistent across all age groups and educational levels, with all demographic details and issues taken into account (Naples 495). This means that women are generally greater in number when it comes to issues concerning service, volunteering, and advocating. The highest volunteering rates occur among boomers, followed closely by

Generation Y (Zedlewski 55), meaning that the population of women volunteers is higher across all ages from boomers to Generation Y.

Certain other factors have been witnessed in the population of volunteers in America, including the fact that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to volunteer than those with lower levels of education (Patel et al. 105). Though women volunteer more, the roles that they take on when volunteering reinforce conventional gender roles (Marshall 170). While perpetuating stereotypical gender roles may be viewed as having a negative impact on society, since women volunteers are also viewed as taking care of and/or nurturing other individuals, their taking on stereotypical gender roles is not seen as negative. According to research reports by Petrezelka and Mannon, volunteer work by women can have the unintended result of leading to the reproduction of the traditional gender roles for women (236).

There is no question as to whether volunteer work that women do greatly benefits organizations and the community. Of course, women have made great contributions to society through their service to their communities. However, women often belittle the efforts that they have put into the work (Levitan and Feldman 154). When women downplay their contributions they contribute to the idea that they are expected to put forth effort in the area of caring for/nurturing others. This is one of the reasons female volunteerism is pegged with the reinforcements of traditional gender roles. However, most of the research available on the area of women and volunteerism has been limited to women in urban and suburban contexts (Willigen 310). The information available is mostly about women with middle and upper class status who have volunteered their labor

(Kaminer 108). Regardless of their social status, women are still the most active in the volunteer context and have specific cultural roles in volunteering.

The media are also highly influential in shaping the context in which volunteer work will be judged, meaning that both culture and the media are influential in how women will view their roles in volunteering (Kinnaird 101). One aspect of American culture that has given rise to volunteerism for women is the promotion of local tourism as a development strategy (Mutchler et al. 1270). The idea of women making a community a welcome place for visitors to feel at home in the same way that a mother or woman who works in the home might do, is the strategy employed in these situations. Owing to the lack of resources, communities have turned to volunteers to help with the labor and resources that are needed for the promotion of local tourism. Like almost all other volunteer needs, women often take the burden of such tourism and development efforts (Wilson and Musick 805). This imbalance is reinforced by one of the most important areas of tourism, the provision of hospitality, which is viewed as the work of women in American culture.

In mainstream media, hospitality has always been depicted mostly as a role for women. With hospitality depicted as a traditional role of women, they often outnumber men in hospitality-driven volunteerism. The volunteer work that women do in the tourism industry, therefore, partly reinforces the gender roles that involve women giving comfort and help to people, roles in which they are expected to excel. The contribution of women to such a vital part of development also amplifies the importance of women volunteering in development projects (Wilson 220).

Volunteering is helpful and instrumental in three ways. First, it contributes to the maintenance of cultural and individual ideologies (Wilson 110). For instance, a woman might volunteer to expand and reinforce her belief in the ideology that women are meant to take care of people. In addition, an individual could choose to volunteer for social reasons so that she can meet new people, and/or for material reasons if funds are available. A greater percentage of women see their volunteer work as a very important part of the community, in that their work helps the community make progress (Baran 39). As a result, it is more likely that a woman will volunteer for similar work again, also explaining why the number of female volunteers is always higher. They view their contributions as obligatory and satisfying.

In their research, Gerstel and Gallagher (10) suggest that women are most likely to volunteer in organizations that are concentrated on issues at a local level. These organizations are directly linked to the community and the neighborhoods. Organizations whose needs mimic the work that women often do, such as providing care, nurturing, and service to others, are more popular among female volunteers (Gerstel 473). On the other hand, men are more likely to join the types of organizations that will promote their careers, and since they are often fewer, so are the numbers of men who volunteer (Bowen 1841). Following this line of thought, Wilson argues that the common and cultural view that men are meant to have experiences in independent activity and self-realization, while women are meant to follow a path that will involve self-sacrifice, is replicated in volunteer work (107-108).

Since volunteer and domestic work is sometimes classified similarly, both lend themselves to informal support and they lack recognition. (Hook 100). Mainstream media

represent women volunteerism, but the focus is on the development and not the people who made it happen, thus women are taken for granted because their volunteer work looks like domestic chores (Johnson 98). Their efforts are no longer considered part of the work but as an extension of the natural expression and disposition that women have to be caring (Abrahams 768). Abrahams elaborates further by stating that the unpaid involvement that women have in volunteerism is absorbed and perpetuated in the American community such that the state is alleviated from servicing people by volunteerism (768). Volunteer work that women do can allow involvement in public and political engagements (Haefner 67). However, that involvement, while important to the process, is often hidden and the contributions of women in the political process are not acknowledged.

Volunteering also provides women with a forum in which they can further their own identities, although the acceptance that women have to work behind the scenes contributes to the invisibility of their work (Abrahams 793). Often times, women downplay the contributions that they make because volunteerism holds little legitimacy in the greater context of the world. Daniels explains that stereotypes about women have led to the minimizing and devaluing the processes that women use to fulfill their work demands (Culture Connections 43). For instance, volunteers who have been put in place to organize a charitable event will need to have considerable organizational skills as well as marketing skills that will help make the fund raising process successful.

Volunteer work on the part of women may be seen in a positive light and conversely as unimportant in American society. In a study conducted by the Susan G. Kommen Breast Cancer Foundation, Blackstone (15) found that women who had

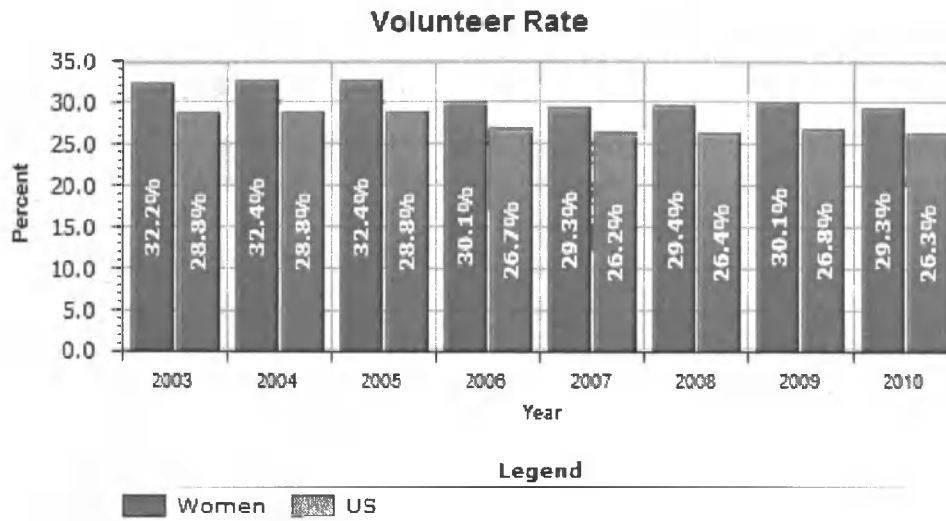
volunteered in activist work refused to put the label of activist on what they were doing (Croteau and Hoynes 220). Instead, they preferred to label the activities socialization and leisure (Eckstein 835). The result was that the volunteers ended up downplaying the results and the impact of their work (Erwin 960). Although breast cancer and its awareness is acknowledged on a national scale, women volunteers rejected the political nature of volunteerism because they did not feel the political outlook was reinforcement to their identities (Blackstone 357). It should be noted that political identities are constructed around a cultural context, meaning that American culture reinforces volunteering as a social rather than a political identity tool for women. Wives and mothers tend to relate the work they do when volunteering to the roles that they have at home and are thus more likely to downplay their role in social change (McPherson and Rotolo 200). An example of this for a mother could include the mother that helps redesign the curriculum at her child's school as a parent volunteer, but downplays her contribution because she sees it as her role as a mother. Along the same lines, a wife that raises scholarship funds for her spouse's business to award to underserved students, may see her efforts as a requirement of being a "good wife/partner." Society rarely acknowledges the service work of women, and women also downplay their volunteer roles. Petrzalka and Mannon (254) suggest that women are the most active and participatory in volunteer work, thus they and the rest of the society should acknowledge the contributions made.

CHAPTER THREE: A Statistical Demonstration

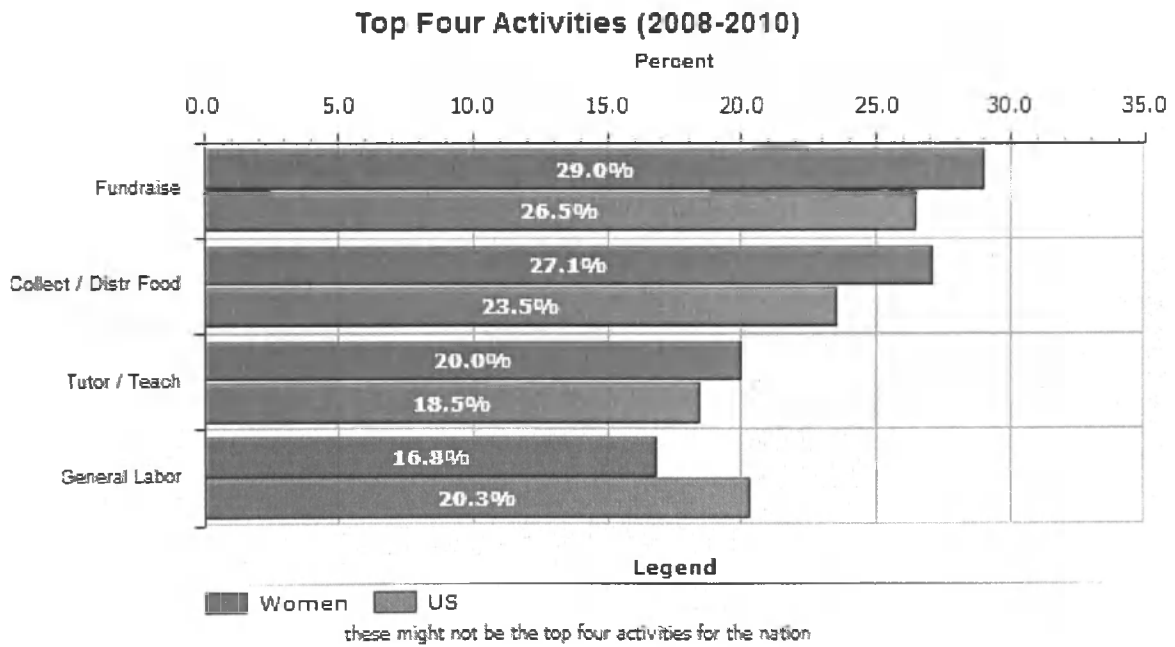
In order to understand what role women of all ages play in the nurturing and caring for America through service and volunteerism, studying the data about volunteers over the last decade is critical. Several organizations report such information and the statistics are shared in multiple ways. The *Volunteering in America Report*, published by the Corporation of National and Community Service, provides important national statistics about volunteerism (Author). The following data, exported from the corporation's website tool, demonstrate critical information to consider when examining women and volunteerism in America. In the corporation's 2008-2010 data collection, it was reported that 23.2% of all volunteers in America were men and 29.6% were women.

To get a better comparison of the roles that men and women play and their level of engagement, customized reports on volunteerism in America are provided. The rates at which women volunteered from 2003-2010, the places that women volunteered from 2008-2010, and the top volunteer activities that women engaged in from 2008 are depicted below:

Volunteer Rates for Women (2003-2010)

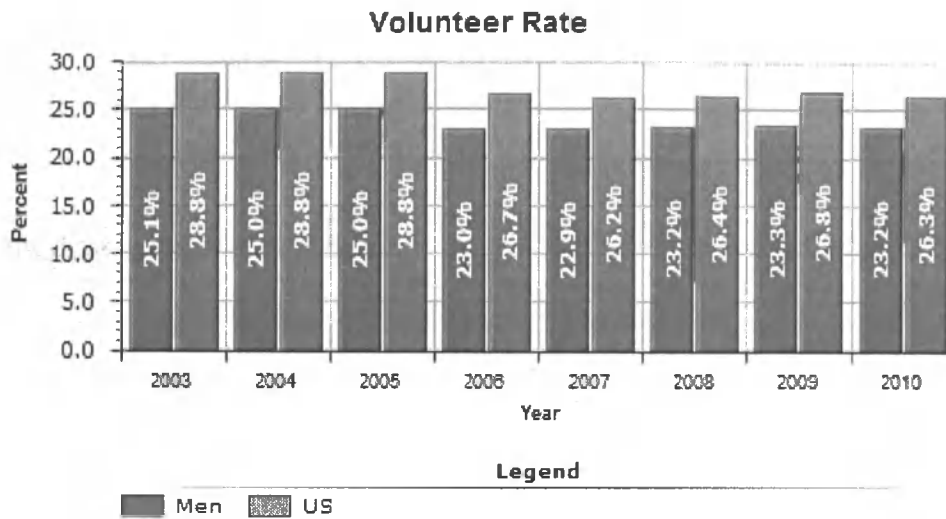


Volunteer Activities for Women (2008-2010)



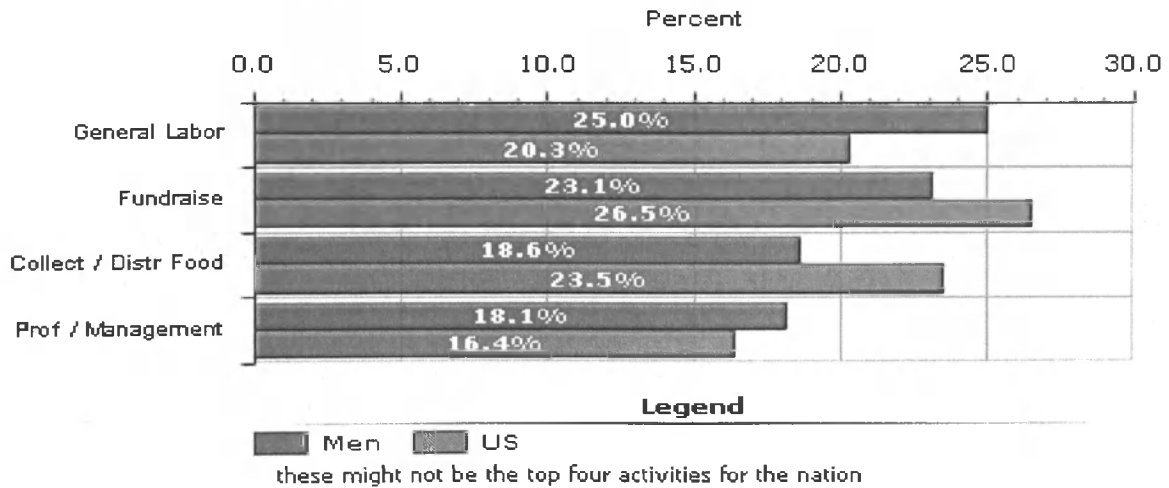
(VOA)

Volunteer Rates for Men (2003-2010)



Volunteer Activities for Men (2008-2010)

Top Four Activities (2008-2010)



(VOA)

These charts demonstrate that stereotypical gender roles are reinforced in the ways in which American women volunteer. As reported above, women have volunteered at a rate higher than the national averages for the seven year time period from 2003-2010.

These figures also depict a higher volunteer rate for women over that of men for the same time period. . Furthermore, women continue to serve more in the areas that perpetuate gender stereotypes with one outlier being identified in the role that women play in fundraising. The data about women volunteering to collect and distribute food and tutor/mentor demonstrate the nurturing role that women are expected to play. Conversely, the data also reports that men are more likely to volunteer in the areas of general laborer and professional management. Given that the last ten years has found more and more educated women in the workforce in the field of professional management and that women volunteer in such a capacity on a regular basis, may demonstrate different data when the next decade is reported. This will be highly dependent on how women report their volunteerism in the category of professional management and whether or not those collecting the data recognize the need to ask the questions in ways that allow for a shift in women's thinking about their own service to be captured.

CHAPTER FOUR: Women and Volunteerism as Depicted in American Messages and Systems

While family, religion, class, upbringing, ethnicity, gender association, and several other human dimensions all play an important part in the civic engagement of individuals, the messages that a culture sends particular populations, in this case women, influence behavior as well. Women are encouraged through various cultural messages and established American systems to perpetuate tradition gender roles and serve communities in nurturing and maternal ways, such as feeding the poor, caring for the elderly, and sheltering the homeless in a direct service format.

From 1920, when women gained the right to vote through the mid 1940's, during the post World War II and Great Depression era, women were leaders and actively engaged in the revitalization of communities and the country overall. Women volunteers of that time were part of a bigger concept later described by author, Robert D. Putnam. In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert D. Putnam argues that the decrease in civic engagement over the last fifty years is based on generational theory. He believes that individuals whose values were molded by the Depression and Second World War are part of a group that he names the "long civic generation." Putnam does not believe that there has been another generation as committed to civic engagement as the "long civic generation."

Other scholars have examined trends in civic participation over time. Some are interested in advancements in technology and the impact that they have on civic engagement. Another group of scholars is interested in the types of activities that are considered civic engagement and how those activities have evolved over time.. In both

cases, some scholars disagree with Putnam's work. Although they recognize that there has been a decrease in traditional civic involvement (bowling leagues, business associations, and professional affiliations), there is a belief that a new hybrid civic activity known as a "blended social action" has been on the increase. These types of activities are events that bring people together in ways that address the need for human interaction and desire to resolve conflict. These activities may blend protests and service; groups come together around a common rallying point in ways that resolve conflict and build relationships.

Social media have played a key role in the development of these blended social actions. During the 2008 presidential campaign in America, all of the candidates had websites and ways to make online contributions and send email to their respective constituents. The then candidate, and now President of the United State of America, devised with his campaign team, a system that allowed for women to engage in a more balanced approach to civic and political engagement. The Obama team put technology and access at the center of social issues and their candidate's campaign. McGrit makes the point that by recruiting twenty-four-year-old Chris Hughes, cofounder of Facebook, to help develop electronic interactive political forums, the Obama campaign supported and encouraged equal engagement among men and women. McGrit further argued that:

Supporters also had considerable discretion to use MySpace to organize their own; the campaign did not micromanage but struck a balance between top-down control and anarchy. In short, Obama, the former Chicago community organizer, created the ultimate online machine (McGrit).

The use of social media to organize people around political campaigns and social causes, as well as to connect resources and needs, has put the power of engagement back in the hands of the “people.” The messages that all volunteers receive are presented, in large part, in temporary and virtual ways. Mainstream publications, websites, and organizations target women in stereotypical ways. While specific social media campaigns put equality at the center, such as President Obama’s 2008 election efforts, discouragingly more permanent social media outlets maintain unequal approaches that are not as progressive as they relate to women.

According to the *Huffington Post*, there are five magazines geared specifically toward women among the ten publications with the highest circulation figures for 2010. Those magazines include Better Homes and Gardens with a 2010 circulation of 7,644,011, Good Housekeeping with a circulation of 4,427,964, Woman’s Day with a circulation of 3,919,488, Family Circle with a circulation of 3,489,673, and Ladies’ Home Journal with a circulation of 3,831,072.

In Better Homes and Gardens, through articles, women readers are encouraged to volunteer at their children’s schools, animal shelters, senior centers, and to consider planning family vacations that are focused on volunteering. One such article suggests that women should also plan their vacations around service to others:

Someday you too might reminisce about that vacation when you picked up enough trash to fill a house. Perhaps the results will be even more tangible. "Some people make life-altering decisions after living in a developing village: they make decisions to downsize, change careers, even something as simple as making a conscious decision to waste less water. It can be a profound experience." (Collins)

Good Housekeeping editions feature articles claiming that women who volunteer age better and develop closer relationships with other women. One article links happiness with volunteering:

Volunteering our time, energy, and money is the right thing to do — we all know that. Furthermore, studies show that this habit boosts happiness; those who work to further the causes they value tend to be happier and healthier, experience fewer aches and pains, and even live longer. They show fewer signs of physical and mental aging.

And it's not just that helpful people also tend to be healthier and happier; studies show that helping others in itself causes happiness. "Be selfless, if only for selfish reasons" is one of my favorite happiness paradoxes. (Rubin)

Woman's Day Magazine articles encourage its readership to abandon traditional volunteering and serving abroad for a new and unique list of volunteer opportunities. The photographs that accompany the article further demonstrate the expectation that women will volunteer to nurture animals, the elderly, soldiers, the planet, and children. (For photos, see Appendices.) The depiction of women baking food, holding the hand of a child, shopping for groceries, spending time with an elderly person all reinforce, in a publication targeted a women, that the role of women is to be the caregiver and to do so in domestic situations. It is discouraging that these publications promote the idea that women ought to abandon volunteer roles that would employ their skill sets as educated professionals and rather continue to serve in ways that reinforce gender stereotypes. There is not a publication targeted at men, for example that suggests the best contribution that men can make in their community would be to bake a holiday meal for the poor.

Family Circle Magazine has published a number of articles with suggestions and advice for mothers on how they can get their children more involved in volunteering. There are fewer articles celebrating or encouraging women themselves to volunteer. The theme of featuring women who have dedicated their efforts to nurturing others carries through this publication for women in the same way as the other magazines for women in this circulation category. Included in a series of such stories is a one about a mother's community garden:

Amy began planting as much as her backyard could grow and enlisted neighbors to do the same, telling them she'd cart the bounty herself to the food bank. Some people had fruit trees, so Amy soon added apples, pears, apricots, plums, and cherries to the haul. She also did a little research and learned that Moscow and Lewiston have a high percentage of seniors on limited incomes, and that 14 percent of area households face some degree of food insecurity, a number that exceeds the national average. "I wanted not only to turn this project into a nonprofit but also to set up a corps of 'garden mentors' to teach people how to grow food and can it themselves," Amy says. "I remember being fascinated as a child when my mom told me stories about my great-grandmother making preserves. This charity was in me all along." (Forsyth)

The Ladies Home Journal featured and celebrated women volunteers in a 2010 article titled *Volunteer Nation*. Again, women who were nurturing the poor, victims, and the challenged were at the center of the article. This article also features the comments of the Vice President's wife, Jill Biden. In many ways this article brings the concept of presenting volunteerism as an American characteristic, full circle, and furthers

the notion of women as an essential part of that concept. While First Ladies and the wives of Vice Presidents do not have inaugural speeches, they address women in other mainstream ways. Below are Jill Biden's comments for women on volunteerism in America:

Jill Biden Talks to Us

The vice president's wife talked to *LHJ* about her top priority.

LHJ: What draws women to volunteer work?

Jill Biden: Everyone gets inspired by something different. A lot of volunteers are motivated by specific needs that they see in their community and a desire to fill them. I know that's the case with me: I first started helping educate women about breast cancer after four of my friends had the disease, one of whom died. Another reason is that adults want to set a positive example for our youth. I know for me it's important to inspire my children and grandchildren to get involved and give back in their communities.

LHJ: Are there any personal rewards of service?

Jill Biden: There are so many. I've developed some truly wonderful friendships through my volunteer activities. I also think you learn a lot -- about yourself, your community, and the larger world -- when you step out of your own situation and see first-hand what your neighbors and fellow Americans are facing. Being active in the larger community makes you more connected, more empathetic, and grateful. I always emerge from service activities feeling inspired, optimistic, and motivated.

LHJ: What causes are most important to you?

Jill Biden: Michelle Obama and I have both been focused on helping military families. For several years I've been active in a group called Delaware Boots on the Ground, which works with service members and their families. Our son Beau is in the Army National Guard and I know firsthand how important it is for families to feel supported.

LHJ: How do you encourage volunteerism?

Jill Biden: I always say that you should start from what you love and know: If you like to read, consider tutoring or doing a story hour at a children's hospital. If you're a gardener, use your talents at the local community center or nursing home. Whether you're an accountant or a handyman or a lawyer, you could offer an hour a week of your skills to help a military family whose child or spouse is deployed. These simple acts of kindness can make such a huge difference. And when volunteers reach out to others they will find so much more meaning in their own lives. (Alexander).

CONCLUSION:

There is a great deal of evidence that volunteerism is an important element of American culture. It has been since the birth of our nation. In many ways it is clear that being in service to one another is a belief on which our country was founded. In the last fifty years, and with particular presidents (both Democrat and Republican), our leaders have continued to build on the idea that being a volunteer is core to the American character. In exploring the inaugural speeches and legacy programs of several presidents, it is evident that these concepts have been used by political leaders to appeal to their constituencies and create a positive image of what it means to be an American in the eyes of the American public.

Understanding the role that women have played and continue to play in the field of service in America is important to understanding the American cultural landscape. The evolving role of women in American culture overall is complex. Over the decades, the journey for American women has been difficult. Understanding how, why, and when American women volunteer in an ever changing environment is important to understanding American culture overall. Women have made their way into the work world, previous gender roles have been challenged, and while some may argue that there has not been enough change, others may see that American women are able and expected to fulfill many roles (sometimes simultaneously). It is not uncommon for a woman to be a working mother, with adult parents to care for, and a cultural and personal expectation that she will volunteer and make the world “a better place.”

Understanding the national service field (AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps *VISTA, RSVP, and Senior Corps) in general provides great insight into American volunteerism

overall. Women volunteer more than men and in more often in traditional gender roles. The number of women that make up the national service corps (all combined) reveals that women consistently volunteer more often than men. That, combined with data from the US Census, reveals that women continue to serve in roles that place them in nurturing and maternal scenarios. Of course there are exceptions to every rule, but there is a general expectation about where and for what reasons women volunteer in America.

Gaining a better understanding of how often, in what ways, and with what influences women in America have been involved in volunteerism from 2000-2010 reveals the cultural expectations of women to volunteer. Understanding how volunteerism is presented in American culture is most likely of particular interest to new graduate students in American Culture and American Studies Programs or to professionals who work with volunteers and in the nonprofit and/or government sectors. For graduate students and scholars of American Studies Programs, understanding roles that women play in all aspects of American life is critical to researching how traditional gender roles continue to perpetuate the minimization of women in our culture. Professionals working in the nonprofit sector rely on volunteers as a resource to sustain and grow the sector. The nonprofit sector formally and informally nurtures American society and it is reliant on women to operate effectively.

Researching the previous materials regarding women and volunteerism in America, exploring the data around the American volunteer, connecting the research with the data, and diving deeper into how American culture has embraced or denied these ideas demonstrates the role of American women in volunteerism in America.

Although women have made great strides in the work world, the portrayal of women primarily serving in nurturing roles that are seen as secondary and by being seen as supportive (rather than assertive), further perpetuates the belief that while there are more women in the field there are fewer of them in leadership positions.

In conclusion, just as women have struggled to find the leadership opportunities in the work world, the struggle to move from supporting to leadership roles in the world of volunteerism continues.

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Appendix:



1. Get Out and About with a Puppy

The New England–based Guiding Eyes for the Blind places an eight-week-old puppy, usually a Labrador or German shepherd, in a volunteer’s home for over a year, after which the canine formally trains to be a guide dog for a blind person. Weekly hour-long classes teach puppy raisers what to do, such as introducing puppies to new sights. “It brings people out of their shells,” says Guiding Eyes marketing manager Michelle Brier, adding that because the dogs are eventually paired with a blind companion, it makes saying goodbye much easier. “You learn how to believe in something bigger than yourself,” she says.



2. Cook Up a Storm

“We use culinary skills to do good,” says Culinary Corps founder Christine Carroll. For a recent project, 12 cooks flew to New Orleans for a week to whip up meals for Habitat for Humanity crews, among other undertakings. Although the organization generally requires professional kitchen experience or a culinary degree, “there’s a bit of wiggle room,” says Carroll; non-cooks who want to contribute could help plan an upcoming trip. “It’s really incredible to see cooks blossom as chef-citizens,” she says.



3. Talk to United States Troops

Give an Hour provides free counseling to soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Part of the organization's mission is to give veterans who don't wish to seek help from the military a place to turn. Weakening the stigma of mental-health issues is another goal.

Those who aren't licensed professionals—social workers, substance-abuse counselors, marriage therapists and so on—can lend a hand in a variety of other ways, including graphic design, marketing and volunteer management.



4. Climb Mountains or Backpack with Urban Youth

Overcoming wilderness obstacles—rushing rivers, steep hills—builds confidence and helps under-resourced kids better handle inner-city obstacles, which is why Big City Mountaineers pairs adults with disadvantaged youths on weeklong backpacking and canoeing trips. If you don't live in the regions where the organization primarily operates (Northwest, West and Midwest), check out Summit for Someone, a program that makes walk-a-thons look restful;

participants fundraise for Big City Mountaineers by soliciting sponsorship for major climbing trips.



5. Teach Yoga, Gardening and More to Middle-Schoolers

Reducing dropout rates by getting kids excited about learning is a major goal of Citizen Schools. Subjects covered in the 90-minute, 10-week after-school, volunteer-taught classes have included journalism, yoga and architecture, with a focus on being “very interactive,” says Stacey Gilbert, Director of Media Relations; volunteers are encouraged to teach what they’re passionate about.

“People are always amazed at what the kids learn in such a short period of time,” she says. Not near a school linked to the program? Gilbert encourages helping out by contacting policymakers about education reform (see website for details).



6. Grant a Wish to a Senior Citizen

Volunteers for the Twilight Wish Foundation grant wishes by donating items (like a home computer requested by a grandmother who wanted to e-mail her grandkids) or by contributing their time. Some wishes—like one from a retired postman who wanted to go over his old route one last time—require planning instead of money, and volunteers tend to choose items or actions that most speak to them.



7. Sponsor a Low-Income Family

The Box Project joins struggling families in depressed regions of rural America with individuals or groups. The idea is not just to provide financial support (volunteers send about \$50 worth of food, clothing and medical supplies monthly), but emotional support as well; most participants develop long-term relationships over many years, cemented through letters. In addition, the organization encourages volunteers to learn about where the family they help lives, so they can impact public services and local policy.



8. Take Care of the Planet

Each year, the National Environmental Education Foundation coordinates hundreds of events around the country in which volunteers improve public parks and wildlife refuges by removing trash, planting trees and doing other earth-friendly activities as part of Public Lands Day. This September, the focus is on water; volunteers will test water quality, clean up shorelines and much more. Know of a public area near you in need of beautification? There's still time to register it on the site.



9. Lend an Ear to Someone in Distress

Contact is a crisis hotline staffed by people who've attended weekly training sessions over a two-month period. "We listen to people's problems and allow them to vent without telling them what they should do or judging them," says long-time volunteer Linda Longo. Volunteers take calls about everything from suicidal thoughts to substance abuse and have access to a database of referral resources. And, perhaps because the 24-hour, seven-day-a-week hotline offers flexible shifts, it's popular with moms who have older children.



10. Find the Perfect Opportunity Online

Hundreds of local organizations offer community service opportunities around the United States and, increasingly, websites are popping up to help volunteers-to-be find the right project. A few good ones: [Volunteer Match](#) and [Idealist](#) will help you discover local ways to help out—just type in your zip code or what you’re interested in. [Compassionate Travel](#) helps you identify where you can go to work with animals in distress, and [One Year for Cancer](#) pairs volunteers with a plethora of places dedicated to fighting the disease. (Wong)