

## **Volunteer Participation in Context: Motivations and Political Efficacy Within Three AIDS Organizations<sup>1</sup>**

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*Employed quantitative and qualitative data in a contextual examination of participation in three San Francisco-area HIV/AIDS organizations: an urban, gay community-based social change setting; an urban, broadly focused information/referral setting; and a suburban individual support setting. The settings attracted different kinds of volunteers and engaged them differently with the setting, each other, and community. In quantitative analyses external political efficacy (belief in the responsiveness of sociopolitical systems to change efforts) significantly distinguished settings, but was best predicted by setting-moderated relationships to scaled motivations. Qualitative data more clearly illuminated volunteers' motivations for participation, as well as complex, embedded relationships between setting, motivations, attitudes about sociopolitical participation, and personal and community experience and identification. Together the findings underscore three unique but related stories for the three AIDS organizations, and the value of contextual approaches to participation and empowerment.*

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**KEY WORDS:** volunteer participation; motivation; AIDS organizations.

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This study examines volunteer participation in three AIDS organizations from a contextual and comparative perspective. We focus particularly on who participates in the settings and why, their beliefs about understanding or changing social and political systems, and how these relate to one another and to setting characteristics. Our orientation is that setting, motivations, and beliefs about social and political engagement must be considered in relation to one another and to community context. Employing both qualitative and quantitative data, we aim for an ecological understanding of how issues of personal and community identification, participants' expectations, and the organization's aims and structure all interrelate to create particular meanings and cultures at the three settings.

Setting structure and aims, motivations for volunteering, and aspects of efficacy have been variables of interest in much of the participation literature, and these variables partially structure this examination. However, rather than viewing setting or volunteer characteristics as independent predictors of participation, we expect that motivations for participation become meaningful in relation to the nature of involvement offered by the setting. Similarly, high or low levels of political efficacy (the efficacy measure of interest here) take on meaning only in relation to experiences with sociopolitical systems. A belief in the responsiveness of these systems to citizen engagement would not be positive if these systems are in fact hostile or indifferent to such engagement. Further, to the extent that aspects of efficacy are conditioned by participation in community settings (Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988), they would be so depending on the relationship between participants' expectations and the settings' fulfillment of them. Setting, motivations, and beliefs about political efficacy would also be tied to the community context and history that give participation meaning.

We have situated this study in what has been dubbed "the AIDS movement," which, despite the monolith that the term suggests, is closely tied to considerations of diversity in communities, settings, and goals of initiated programs. Of particular interest to community psychologists is that in converting "disease victims" and "patients" into experts (Epstein, 1991) and in delivering care and prevention services, AIDS volunteerism provides a model of empowerment theory in action (e.g., Zimmerman & Perkins, 1995). In the process of health and human services delivery, gay communities (and their allies) confronted stigma, medical conservatism, government apathy or antipathy, and media misrepresentations (e.g., Altman, 1986; Conrad & Kern, 1989; Epstein, 1991; Garnets & D'Augelli, 1994; Vaid, 1995). Because of the association between AIDS and already marginalized identities, and because AIDS activism cannot be separated from

civil rights and community building efforts in gay and lesbian communities, there is a strong political component to much AIDS volunteerism.

Much attention has been given to the characteristics of volunteers in the participation literature, particularly their motivations for involvement (e.g., Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Friedmann, Florin, Wandersman, & Meier, 1988; Okun & Eisenberg, 1992; Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, & Chavis, 1990; Serow, 1991). Some of this research has suggested that a combination of purposive or suprapersonal (e.g., altruism or civic duty) with "solidary" or interpersonal (e.g., group identification or social interactions) motivations, are the best predictors of actively involved volunteers in neighborhood, block, or community organizations (e.g., Okun & Eisenberg, 1992; Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich, & Chavis, 1990; Wandersman, Florin, Friedmann, & Meier, 1987). Other models include material benefits (e.g., skills acquisition) as an additional factor (e.g., Knoke & Wood, 1981). With regard to AIDS organizations, Snyder and Omoto (1991) found that motivations for personal growth and enhancement of self esteem were the best predictors of continued participation. The differences in findings and constructs are probably attributable to differences in the community settings studied. That is, these data are best construed as descriptive rather than prescriptive, to avoid the interpretation that there are "right motivations" or a "right type" of volunteer.

We expect that a diversity of settings will offer different kinds of opportunities and roles, providing meaningful experiences for people who may hold a variety of goals and expectations (Rappaport, 1977). Relatedness or an experience of communion might be motivations for many participants (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Serow, 1991). An experience of direct action based in ideology and effects at the sociopolitical level might motivate others (e.g., Keiffer, 1984). This distinction, sometimes conceptualized as "personal" versus "political," may be hard to draw or misleading in many contexts (e.g., Rappaport & Stewart, 1997). Given the intersection of identity and community construction in gay communities, the mutual-help quality of many of the settings, and the political nature of HIV/AIDS, the personal and the political do not separate easily (e.g., Epstein, 1991; Kayal, 1991; Kramer, 1989; Patton, 1990). Also, given that AIDS volunteerism has drawn together heterosexual women and gay men (e.g., Patton, 1990) it is worth exploring how communion-oriented (personal) and systems-oriented (political) motivations interconnect and influence participation. It is worthwhile as well because communion and relatedness have been underplayed in the participation literature (e.g., Rappaport, 1995; Riger, 1993).

Efficacy measures also have been frequent variables of interest in participation research. We expect that two measures of political efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1973; Craig & Maggioto, 1982; Powell, 1982; Shingles, 1981; Zim-

merman, 1989) may be of particular relevance for AIDS volunteerism. Internal political efficacy assesses beliefs about one's own ability to understand social and political systems. External political efficacy (perhaps less a measure of personal efficacy than of attitude) assesses beliefs about the responsiveness of those systems to change efforts. The literature provides two conceptualizations of the relationship between political efficacy and participation. Bandura (1973) has termed those with high levels of internal political efficacy (confidence in understanding) combined with low levels of external political efficacy (skepticism about the system) as "unconventional activists." The same combination has been linked to minority involvement in political action (Powell, 1982; Shingles, 1981). However, in the context of HIV/AIDS and other types of activism the term "unconventional" seems misplaced; activist alone seems a sufficient descriptor. A complementary conceptualization, although not based on specific measures, is Serow's (1991) suggestion that many people look for a direct, one-on-one engagement from volunteering because of the alienating experiences of institutionally controlled lives and a sense that these institutions are beyond their influence, which might translate into low levels of both internal and political efficacy. Both conceptualizations focus on a disaffection with social and political institutions, but they differ in what they suggest about forms of involvement and perceived political efficacy. Bandura's suggests a savvy, activist involvement, while Serow's suggests a personal, service-oriented involvement. Either or both characterizations might apply to AIDS volunteers and their choices for participation.

Participation is also a matter of locating what Riger (1984) called vehicles for empowerment, or settings that serve as effective catalysts for volunteers' values and efforts. We expect that individuals not only have differing motivations for and beliefs about participation, but that settings will differ in the cultures that they create and in the cultures that create them (e.g., Sarason, 1972; Wicker, 1979). Services and goals provide discernible setting distinctions that influence who will be attracted and their expectations for involvement. The settings selected for this study reflect some of the diversity of aims within San Francisco-area AIDS organizations: direct-action *social change* organizations; large, institutionally networked *information/referral* agencies; and, client-centered *individual support* projects for people living with AIDS. We anticipate that this diversity of setting and community will be related to the diversity of individuals and of motivations for participation. Furthermore, although there have been few systematic analyses, it is possible that setting goals covary with setting structure, for instance, social action settings may tend toward alternative structure (e.g., Reinharz, 1984). Activities and services may be factors in volunteers' selection of participation venues, but the structure and climate

of settings are likely to influence the level and quality of motivations for continued participation (e.g., Maton & Salem, 1995; Prestby et al., 1990).

The relationships between setting, motivations, and political efficacy are likely further embedded in contexts of community and personal identification. How best to capture these relationships is an underpinning issue. Whether they can be quantified and assessed in linear fashion, or whether the same variables may hold different implications in different contexts, is a question that arose early in the study. Our approach is both contextual and comparative, with the intention of relating setting- and variable-based information. We have employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods with the aim of capitalizing on the potential benefits of each approach, particularly the relating of "local meanings" (Geertz, 1983) to broader constructs and generalizations.

We have four primary questions for this study. First, what are the "cultures" of each setting? That is, who is attracted to the settings and how do their experiences differ; what are the structures of the settings and how do they conceive their relationships to particular communities? Through a series of qualitative and quantitative measures we aim to build up a more triangulated "thick description" (Geertz, 1983) of the settings.

Second, how do motivations differ for volunteers at the three settings, and how do such differences relate to setting activities? It seems reasonable to anticipate that motivations reflecting community identification and a desire for community-level engagement (e.g., Omoto & Snyder's "community concern") will be highest at the social change setting. Similarly, motivations reflecting a desire for direct personal service and relatedness (e.g., Omoto & Snyder's "esteem enhancement") will be highest at the individual support setting. Alternatively, motivations for volunteering may require a context-specific understanding; that is, community concern may hold a different meaning for volunteers at an individual support setting than at a social change setting. Thus, a priori definitions may miss the mark. We are also interested in motivations for *continuing* involvement; that is, the benefits that volunteers cite as important in their involvement. We expect that setting factors such as role opportunities, quality of relationships, and the nature of engagement in relation to volunteers' expectations, will be major influences on how these motivations are discussed.

Third, is there a personal versus political dynamic characterizing volunteers' participation? Differences in levels of internal and external political efficacy as reported by volunteers across the three settings can be expected, given that the nature of engagement varies from the more explicitly political (at the social change setting) to the more specifically personal (at the individual support setting). The studies of Serow (1991) and Bandura (1973) noted earlier offer potentially different characterizations

of volunteers in terms of their understanding and engagement of sociopolitical institutions. Following Serow, external and internal political efficacy would both be lowest among the individual support volunteers. Following Bandura, internal political efficacy would be high and external political efficacy lowest for the social change volunteers, the activists. Alternatively, the personal and political may be intertwined. Faith in one's understanding of political processes and in political systems' responsiveness to change efforts could mean different things for volunteers in different settings.

Fourth, how do volunteers' motivations for participation, their beliefs about political efficacy, and setting characteristics interrelate? That is, might volunteers' perceptions of internal and external political efficacy be predicted best not simply by setting or motivation differences but by the interaction of both setting and volunteer motivations? For example, volunteers with high "community concern" motivations might report different levels of political efficacy at a social change setting in contrast to an individual support setting. Alternatively, motivation, perceived efficacy, and setting type might interrelate in seamless and context-specific ways, such that relationships between volunteer motivation and perceived efficacy might look qualitatively different across settings. We expect that it will be beliefs about political efficacy in particular that will differentiate these settings. As a check on this hypothesis, we have included two measures of personal efficacy, mastery (e.g., Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981) and general self-efficacy (e.g., Tipton & Worthington, 1984). We expect that levels of these measures will remain approximately constant (and relatively high) across settings in contrast to differences in political efficacy.

## METHOD

### Sampling Procedures

#### *Setting Selection*

The three San Francisco area AIDS organizations participating in the study were chosen based on nomination by volunteers and staff (executive directors, volunteer coordinators) from seven area AIDS organizations of a variety of types and locations. We asked for effective examples of agencies performing their particular activities and for a range of settings that might serve to exemplify the range of AIDS-related services, activities, and target communities in the Bay Area. The three final settings were selected as exemplars of a general, albeit simplified, typology of AIDS organizations in the area: (a) a gay community-based direct action setting; (b) a broadly di-

rected education and resource coordination setting; and (c) a support service setting for persons with HIV/AIDS. The settings also reflect a continuum from community-level social change to individual-level personal support. All of the settings were originally primarily gay male, and volunteer-owned organizations; all three still have significant gay male leadership. All three settings are not-for-profit and nongovernmental organizations. Brief descriptions follow based on initial, preentry information.

*Social Change*, an urban, gay community-based organization focusing on HIV prevention through direct action and "community mobilization." The organization has a paid/professional staff of 6 and an estimated 100 volunteers. Volunteer training is provided on a regular basis. Organization decision-making is generally inclusive/horizontal and volunteers are participants in most organizational decisions.

*Information/Referral*, a relatively autonomous part of a large, well-established, urban organization providing a variety of educational, public service, and prevention services to diverse communities in the city and county. The setting employs a hotline format to provide information on the transmission, prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, referrals to service and support agencies, and linkage to diverse community organizations and events related to sexuality or HIV/AIDS. Ongoing, multilingual training is provided on roughly a monthly basis. There is a professional staff of 6 and an estimated 100 volunteers. Decision making is vertical and the structure is traditional/hierarchical.

*Individual Support*, a suburban (serving a county across the bay from San Francisco) setting providing emotional and practical support services to persons with AIDS in the form of ongoing, one-on-one volunteer/client relationships. The setting serves a large ethnically and economically diverse area. Ongoing training is provided on a monthly basis. The organization has a paid/professional staff of 10 and an estimated 150 volunteers. A few volunteers still hold executive positions but there has been a shift toward a more traditional/hierarchical structure.

### *Participants*

*Volunteers.* To accommodate the confidentiality policies of organizations which prohibited broad access to the settings or release of volunteer's names without their consent, study participants were recruited in several ways: (a) Volunteers working on premises were approached directly, by the researcher or by the volunteer coordinator, and were asked to participate; (b) the researcher presented the research plan and invited participation at meetings of volunteers, volunteer group facilitators, and volunteer training

coordinators; (c) support group or team leaders distributed questionnaires to groups meeting off site or after hours (this was the primary tactic at the individual support setting, where most volunteer activity takes place off premises). A letter of consent attached to each questionnaire explained the purpose of the research, the confidentiality precautions taken, and requested the signature and address of each respondent for possible follow-up study. A total of 66 volunteers participated in the questionnaire study. The response rate varied slightly by setting but averaged about 50% (range 48–51%). We used staff and volunteer estimates of the number of setting volunteers currently *active* (versus all volunteer files). Within that group, our collection method likely produced a sample of the most active and involved volunteers. These may be the volunteers of most interest, but may not fully represent the volunteers more generally. Respondents were 45 (68%) males and 21 (32%) females. Of the males, 41 (91%) self-identified as gay and 4 (9%) as bisexual. Of the females, 16 (76%) identified themselves as heterosexual, 4 (19%) as lesbian, and 1 (5%) as bisexual. The total sample was 68% gay/lesbian identified, 24% heterosexual, and 8% bisexual. The average age was 38 years ( $SD = 13.23$ , Range = 21–72). By-setting demographics are reported below.

*Paid Staff and Leadership.* To provide additional setting information, three staff members from each setting completed a separate organizational questionnaire, the executive director or their equivalent (a gay man at the social change organization, women at the other two settings), the volunteer coordinator (a woman at the social change setting—the only woman at that setting—and gay men at the other two settings), and the education director (gay men at every setting). (The women staff at these settings did not offer an identification with a particular sexual orientation.)

## Measures

*Volunteer Questionnaire.* In addition to the listed scales and items, each of the four sections of the questionnaire (organizational participation, motivations, etc.) asked respondents to provide open-ended responses or comments related to these domains (e.g., “Do you have any comments, or is there anything that you want to add about the organization and/or your involvement with it? Anything you have to add would be very helpful.”) A fifth question asked for any additional information that would be important to our understanding participant choices and experience. Responses to these questions, and those included in the staff questionnaire, were the source of qualitative data.



*Background Information.* Respondents were asked to provide (a) basic demographic information (gender, age, race or ethnicity, and occupation/profession) and (b) sexual orientation information (gay/lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual).

*Organizational Participation.* Nine items addressed aspects of participation. Respondents were asked: (a) what, if any leadership or decision-making positions they hold or have held, rated 1 (no leadership) to 4 (e.g., committee chair); (b) how long they have been a volunteer, rated 1 (0–1 months) to 7 (over 30 months); and, (c) how many hours they committed to the organization on a monthly basis, rated 1 (0–3 hours) to 7 (over 70 hours). Respondents also rated the amount of time they spent in various roles or activities (e.g., emotional support, training).

*Motivations for Volunteering.* Motivations were assessed in an open-ended response format and with scaled measures specifically designed for AIDS volunteerism. Omoto and Snyder's (1990) 25-item AIDS Volunteerism Motivation Scale assesses five motivations, reported as distinct, each measured by five items and scored on a Likert scale from 1 (*not important at all*) to 7 (*extremely important*): *Values* ( $\alpha = .74$ ) addresses more abstract beliefs or principles the individual may hold which motivated their involvement (e.g., "because of my humanitarian obligation to help others"). *Community concern* ( $\alpha = .82$ ) addresses concern for, or a sense of responsibility to, one's social group or community (e.g., "because I consider myself an advocate for certain communities and issues, e.g., gay issues"). *Esteem enhancement* ( $\alpha = .80$ ) addresses the extent to which a sense of isolation or alienation in one's personal or social life motivated involvement (e.g., "to feel less lonely"). *Personal development* ( $\alpha = .77$ ) addresses a desire for personal growth as an incentive to volunteering (e.g., "to challenge myself and test my skills"). *Understanding* ( $\alpha = .80$ ) addresses a desire to acquire information and education about AIDS and how it is dealt with (e.g., "to learn more about how to prevent AIDS"). Omoto and Snyder reported a 2-week test-retest correlation for the scale of .72. Intercorrelations among the subscales for this sample are reported below.

*Political and Personal Efficacy.* Four validated scales from the Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988; Zimmerman, 1989) questionnaire were used. *Political efficacy* was assessed by Craig and Maggiotto's (1982) 14-item, 7-point Likert-scaled measure, made up of two distinct subscales, confirmed for validity and reliability by Zimmerman (1989). *External political efficacy* (9 items,  $\alpha = .84$ ) addresses beliefs about whether a social or "political system is responsive to change efforts" (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988, p. 729), for example, "I don't think public officials care much what people like me think." *Internal political efficacy* (5 items,  $\alpha = .76$ ) addresses the belief that one possesses the ability or skills to affect or change political

systems, for example, "I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues which confront our society." *Personal efficacy* was assessed by two distinct, 7-point Likert-scaled measures: *General self-efficacy* (26 items,  $\alpha = .78$ ), measured by a scale developed by Tipton and Worthington (1984), addresses beliefs about one's abilities and competency in general, for example, "I have a lot of self confidence." *Mastery* (7 items,  $\alpha = .81$ ), measured by a scale developed by Pearlin et al. (1981), addresses beliefs about skills and ability to accomplish particular goals, for example, "I can do just about anything I really set my mind to." The wording of certain items was revised for gender neutrality.

### *Organizational Leadership Questionnaire*

To gain more information and a broader perspective on the settings and their potential for empowering volunteers, a 23-item questionnaire was distributed to volunteer coordinators, education directors, and setting directors at each setting. In both open-ended and scaled response items, staff members were asked for information about organizational mission (e.g., *the formal mission statement*) and services and activities, to augment the information provided by volunteers. The questionnaire also elicited staff perceptions of structure and the level and extent of volunteer participation in the operation and decision making within the setting.

Structure was assessed by questions based on Holleb and Abrams' (1975) elements of classification of settings as alternative: an ideological commitment to providing alternative services, a high ratio of nonprofessional (or volunteer) to professional staff (based on reported number of paid/professional staff and average number of active volunteers), and the provision of ongoing training. Organizational structure was further assessed from the standpoint of volunteers' participation in decision making, responsiveness to suggestions for change and diversity, and staff perceptions of the importance of volunteers to the achievement of organization goals. The openness and availability of leadership roles to volunteers and the under- or over-population of the setting were also addressed in open- and closed-ended questions (e.g., "Would an increase in the number or the interest of volunteers allow expansion of services or diversification of activities?").

### **Analyses**

The relatively small sample, particularly at the by-setting level, limited the possibilities for quantitative analyses, which are fairly straightforward and largely descriptive. Maximum use was made of the qualitative data

from generous responses to the open-ended questions. Qualitative and quantitative data were therefore analyzed and are reported together. We aimed to build a fairly rich and contextual description of settings through the sum of the different analyses and their relationships.

Analysis of the qualitative data, where it required aggregation and classification, followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) strategy for cross-case, thematic content analysis. The authors first developed preliminary classifications for the data within each setting. This process was facilitated by the fact that data had been bounded by the structure of the questionnaire, with respondents topically addressing initial and continuing motivations, organizational perceptions, etc. At this stage inclusion was the primary criterion, and codes were checked against disconfirming cases. After the iterative process of refining the classification schemes for each setting, we developed a cross-case matrix for comparison of data across settings and refined descriptive terms for coding. As a check, we asked two colleagues who were naive to the study questions to assign the data directly from the questionnaires to the categories we had developed, with the instructions to look for cases that did not fit, or that fit more than one of the categories (Kohler Reissman, 1993). The matrix was then revised and returned to our colleagues for a final check on consistency. Characteristic quotations were then chosen for the tables.

## RESULTS

### Settings and Participants

#### *Volunteer Settings*

The initial description of settings as examples of social change, information/referral, and individual support agencies was confirmed based on staff reports of organization mission and services and on the percentage of volunteers devoting most or all of their time to each type of activity (Table I). The *social change* setting is devoted to "halting the spread of HIV through community mobilization"; that is, recruiting community members into community and political involvement and into safer sexual practices (including enlisting them to change others' behaviors and attitudes). The setting is strongly identified with its urban gay community and aims to create a sense of collaborative, community action, both of which were reflected in volunteer comments and indirect references to "my" community, "we" or "us." Volunteers described their work in terms of *action* and *change* in their own community (Table II). All respondents from this setting

Table I. Setting Classifications

Dimension	Setting		
	Social change	Information/referral	Individual support
Services/activities	"Community mobilization" HIV prevention; collective attitude change	Hotline format HIV/AIDS information and service referral	One-on-one emotional and practical support services
Volunteer activities	Activism & education (100%)	Phone information referrals & counseling (100%)	Emotional support (69%); public speaking (13%); training (9%); committees (9%)
Primary focus	Community level	Community & Individual levels	Individual level
Structure	Alternative	Hierarchical	Transitional: to hierarchical
Location	Urban	Urban	Suburban
Outreach focus and approach	Specific (Gay males) and tailored	Broad, but tailored for specific communities	General, not systematically tailored for specific communities
Age of setting	3 years	11 years	6 years

devoted most or all of their time to outreach "action in the community," recruiting for and leading focus groups or community meetings, bar and street corner interviews and questionnaire distribution, and phone follow-ups with interviewees. Leadership opportunities with autonomy are numerous, primarily in the form of team leaders or focus group and meeting facilitators. Staff and volunteers confirm that expansion and diversification of activities "are tied directly to volunteer involvement, interest, and initiative" (see Table I).

The *information/referral* setting is devoted to slowing the spread of HIV/AIDS through dissemination of frank information on transmission and safer sex practices, referrals for programs and resources, and providing testing and treatment information, all in a hotline format. Volunteers described their work in terms of *education* and *empathy* for "anyone who wants it" (see Tables I and II). The setting does not claim identification with any single community but tries to provide tailored, culturally responsive infor-

Table II. Qualitative Summary

Dimension	Setting		
	Social change	Information/referral	Individual support
Motivations for volunteering	<p><i>Action:</i> To channel the anger I feel at this disease and the response to it (in government, society, etc.) (64%)</p>	<p><i>Personal loss:</i> My friend died, when I didn't have him to care for I decided to give a little of my time in his honor (59%)</p>	<p><i>Personal loss:</i> My 27-year-old son, who was gay, died of AIDS. I hope in some small way I can repay all those who were so kind by helping others (95%)</p>
	<p><i>Social networking:</i> To meet people to date, to network to find a job (50%)</p>	<p><i>Education (self &amp; other):</i> A reality check; to gain experience working with AIDS; to be an info resource for friends/coworkers (68%)</p>	
Perceptions of work	<p><i>Change:</i> There are habits of denial that can be broken down through the work of the project; Action in the midst of crisis (91%)</p>	<p><i>Education (and empathy):</i> As a health educator I provide HIV/AIDS education to anyone who wants it; educating people, providing an empathetic ear (95%)</p>	<p><i>Personal relatedness:</i> It's difficult, tragic work. It's also completely satisfying. My client and I cry together, but we laugh together, too (86%)</p>
Continuing motivations/benefits	<p><i>Connection:</i> [I] make a positive contribution to others, give back or pass on what others have contributed to [me] in my community, actually doing that (86%)</p>	<p><i>Connection:</i> A sense of being better connected to what is going on in our society. Social connection; feeling supported by my fellow volunteers (69%)</p>	<p><i>Connection:</i> I don't know who gets more out of it, but when [my client] says "thanks, you made me feel better," well, I feel better too; I have a good friend in my client &amp; will always be here for him (86%)</p>
	<p><i>Coping:</i> What I do here is very important to my life in terms of dealing with an issue that has hurt and angered me, as to what I feel I need to do, this work is very important to me (69%)</p>	<p><i>Coping:</i> It's been a way to deal with multiple loss (50%)</p>	<p><i>Coping:</i> Being HIV+ for 10+ years, my work here has lowered my stress, increased my longevity and enhanced my quality of life (14%) Support and understanding when my soulmate died (27%)</p>

Table II. Continued

Dimension	Setting		
	Social change	Information/referral	Individual support
	<i>Skills &amp; leadership:</i> I have influenced others on my performance and training of others has upgraded the quality of our team (82%)	<i>Skills &amp; knowledge:</i> Proper training, knowledge of the big picture & direction (91%)	<i>Leadership:</i> I have been the driving force behind changes in Education because I chose to take that and do something with it (14%)
Identified community (for/with whom)	<i>Gay (male) community:</i> My community; (we, us)	<i>Multiple communities:</i> Not only my community, all communities; Black, straight, IVDU, many groups—not only gay white males	<i>Multiple communities:</i> I see a tremendous need for this in the Latino community, which may not be addressed adequately by this organization—the outlook tends to be more gay white male

mation and services. Volunteers spoke of the broad outreach focus in positive terms, with an appreciation for contact with diverse communities (Table II). The only available leadership roles were the training of new volunteers and a volunteer representative position on the executive board. According to staff reports, volunteers “free [staff] to do [their] job more effectively and with less stress”; new “projects and activities are conceived and initiated” by staff, in a top-down structure of decision making (Table I).

The *individual support* setting is devoted to “providing emotional and practical support to persons living with HIV/AIDS.” The majority (69%) of respondents from this setting reported “ongoing, one-on-one support relationships” with a client with HIV/AIDS, and spoke of their work in terms of *personal relatedness* (see Tables I and II). While some volunteers did report identification with a particular community (e.g., Latino, gay male), it was most often mentioned in contrast to the setting’s lack of community identification or an identification different from their own (Table II). Most volunteers had little direct contact with the organizational setting beyond their support groups and, in fact, defined their setting as the relationship with the client. However, three respondents (13%) reported additional involvement in the new community education program and four (18%) reported significant involvement in organizational responsibilities such as training new volunteers or administering volunteer activities (Table I). Setting structure was highly stratified into multiple levels of leadership and

decision making. Various leadership roles were still potentially available to volunteers, including membership on several planning and coordinating committees. However, the role of volunteers was explicitly stated to be “declining in force and importance,” with professional staff considered “more important to the project’s future direction and expansion.” Decision making often proceeds “without volunteer input [and] if input is solicited, it is ignored.” Some stress due to the transition from volunteer-run to professional governance was apparent in comments from both staff and volunteers at this setting.

*Participants by Setting: Who Is Attracted*

Further and significant differences in settings were found in the characteristics of setting inhabitants; that is, who is attracted to each of the settings. The demographic representativeness of samples for each setting was informally confirmed based on staff estimates of age, sex, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity representations within their settings. Using log linear analysis for sex ratio (Pearson’s  $\chi^2 = 20.53, p < .001$ ) and sexual

**Table III.** Participant Demographics by Setting

Variable	Setting		
	Social change ( <i>n</i> = 22)	Information referral ( <i>n</i> = 22)	Individual support ( <i>n</i> = 22)
Age <sup>a</sup>			
<i>M</i>	30.2	36.4	45.7
<i>SD</i>	5.6	12.4	15.0
Sex <sup>b</sup>			
Male	22 (100%)	15 (68%)	8 (36%)
Female	0 (0%)	7 (32%)	14 (64%)
Sexual orientation <sup>b</sup>			
Gay/lesbian	20 (91%)	15 (68%)	10 (45.5%)
Heterosexual	0 (0%)	5 (23%)	11 (50%)
Bisexual	2 (9%)	2 (9%)	1 (4.5%)
Racial/ethnicity self-identification			
White	14 (64%)	21 (95.5%)	18 (82%)
African American	2 (9%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.5%)
Latino/a	2 (9%)	0 (0%)	2 (9%)
Asian/Pac. Islander	3 (13.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Mixed Heritage	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)

<sup>a</sup>*F* test,  $p < .05$ .

<sup>b</sup>Pearson’s chi-square test,  $\chi^2, p < .05$ .

orientation ( $\chi^2 = 15.02, p < .001$ ), and ANOVA for age ( $F = 9.79, p < .001$ ), significant and embedded setting differences were found (Table III). The urban, community-based social change volunteers were young gay or bisexual males (although such gender segregation is unusual in AIDS organizations in the Bay Area). The suburban individual support volunteers were older, almost two thirds female, and half heterosexual. The information/referral volunteers were about one third female and heterosexual, and midway between the other settings in terms of age.

### *Length and Level of Volunteer Involvement*

Table IV reports means, standard deviations, and comparisons (ANOVA and Tukey's HSD) for length of participation and average hours spent per month at volunteer activities (time devoted). Length of participation, but not time devoted, significantly differentiated settings, with volunteers at the individual support setting reporting the longest average involvement (18–23 months), and the social change setting with the shortest length of involvement (7–11 months).

Level of leadership also differentiated settings ( $\chi^2 = 10.90, p < .01$ ), with significantly more leadership displayed by volunteers at the social change setting. However, comparing leadership levels requires some qualification as structure and stratification varied across settings, and some positions existed at one but not the other settings. Small group leadership at the social change setting was the primary leadership role, and carried a

**Table IV.** Length and Level of Involvement by Setting

Variable	Setting			Test statistic	Multiple comparisons
	Social change (SC)	Information/referral (IR)	Individual support (IS)		
<b>Level of leadership</b>					
Low	10	20	16	$\chi^2 = 10.9^a$	SC > IR SC > IS
High	12	2	6		
<b>Length of involvement (months)</b>					
<i>M</i>	3.41	4.27	5.18	$F = 5.37^a$	IR > SC
<i>SD</i>	1.26	1.88	2.13		
<b>Time devoted (hours/month)</b>					
<i>M</i>	2.91	2.96	3.36	$F = 0.99$	—
<i>SD</i>	1.11	0.58	1.62		

<sup>a</sup> $p < .05$ .



great deal of executive and goal-setting responsibility, whereas this role carried little more than supportive responsibility at the individual support setting. These factors, combined with sample size considerations, dictated a collapse of categories into high and low (including no) leadership levels for analysis. Ranking was based on level of participation in organizational decision making and policy formation and on level of autonomy in performing and initiating activities, as described by volunteers and setting staff. Some information is lost in this collapse. For example, leadership at the individual support setting was primarily on executive and planning committees and was longstanding. At the social change setting, team and project leadership were primary and rotated fairly often.

**Motivations and Efficacy**

*Strength of Relationships*

Table V reports correlations among the motivation and efficacy subscales. Except for Community concern and Understanding all the motivation subscales were significantly intercorrelated for this sample. The efficacy measures were not significantly correlated to the motivation scales. General self-efficacy was significantly related to Mastery, but the efficacy subscales otherwise appear to be fairly independent of each other.

*Motivations for Volunteering*

*Scaled Motivations.* Table VI reports the means, standard deviations, ANOVA, and pairwise (Tukey HSD) comparisons for the formal motivation measures across settings. Community concern, Esteem enhancement, and

**Table V. Motivation and Efficacy Measures Correlation Matrix (N = 66)**

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Community concern	.59 <sup>a</sup>	.47 <sup>a</sup>	.41 <sup>a</sup>	.36	-.16	.12	.17	.02
2. Esteem enhancement	—	.56 <sup>a</sup>	.48 <sup>a</sup>	.43 <sup>a</sup>	-.30	.10	.23	-.04
3. Personal development		—	.56 <sup>a</sup>	.46 <sup>a</sup>	-.19	-.03	.26	.09
4. Values			—	.39 <sup>a</sup>	-.24	.06	.17	.06
5. Understanding				—	-.11	-.13	.19	.16
6. External political efficacy					—	.14	-.06	.32
7. Internal political efficacy						—	.28	.02
8. Self-efficacy							—	.50 <sup>a</sup>
9. Mastery								—

<sup>a</sup>Bonferroni adjusted *p* < .05.

personal development motivations significantly differentiated between settings, but contrary to our hypotheses differentiation occurred in a uniform pattern (see Table VI). That is, at all settings Values was the highest rated and Esteem Enhancement the lowest rated motivation for volunteering. All motivations were rated highest in the social change setting and all motivations got their lowest rating at the individual support setting.

**Table VI.** Summary Statistics: Measures of Motivations and Efficacy

Variable	Setting			<i>F</i>	Multiple comparisons
	Social change (SC)	Information/referral (IR)	Individual support (IS)		
Motivations for volunteering					
Community concern					
<i>M</i>	5.45	4.87	3.48	13.5 <sup>b</sup>	IR>IS
<i>SD</i>	0.93	1.42	1.45		SC>IS
Esteem enhancement					
<i>M</i>	3.89	3.36	2.37	10.5 <sup>b</sup>	IR>IS
<i>SD</i>	1.05	1.16	1.13		SC>IS
Personal development					
<i>M</i>	5.12	4.36	3.67	6.9 <sup>b</sup>	SC>IS
<i>SD</i>	1.02	1.28	1.53		
Values					
<i>M</i>	5.88	5.79	5.29	2.6	—
<i>SD</i>	0.81	0.75	1.16		
Understanding					
<i>M</i>	4.73	4.38	3.96	1.8	—
<i>SD</i>	1.36	1.53	1.16		
Political and personal efficacy					
External political efficacy					
<i>M</i>	3.93	4.28	4.68	3.19 <sup>b</sup>	IS>SC
<i>SD</i>	1.07	1.13	0.95		
Internal political efficacy					
<i>M</i>	5.16	5.44	4.82	2.24 <sup>a</sup>	—
<i>SD</i>	1.13	0.82	0.94		
General self-efficacy					
<i>M</i>	5.12	5.05	4.89	1.13	—
<i>SD</i>	0.49	0.40	0.66		
Mastery					
<i>M</i>	5.77	5.70	5.73	0.04	—
<i>SD</i>	0.74	0.85	0.85		

<sup>a</sup>*p* = .10.

<sup>b</sup>*p* < .05.

*Qualitative Reports.* Respondents' open-ended accounts of their motivations for volunteering were more specific to the type of work in which they were engaged. Table II gives representative quotations for identified motivations at each setting. At the social change setting, volunteers reported a desire for direct action and for social networking, often both, as motivating their involvement and choice of settings. Volunteers at the information/referral setting reported an interest in education of themselves and others and/or an experience of personal loss due to HIV/AIDS as motivating and setting selection factors. Every respondent from the individual support setting reported personal loss due to HIV/AIDS as motivating their involvement and choice of settings. That these volunteers all cited this single key motivation for participation may in part account for the overall lower endorsement at this setting of the scaled motivations, which did not directly address this issue.

#### *Motivations for Continuing Involvement*

Respondents also provided information about their reasons for continuing participation at the settings. These reasons differed from those for initiating involvement in that continuing motivations were more related to effects and benefits of their work and to the nature of the setting's structure (see Table II). In somewhat varying forms, Connection emerged as a major factor across the settings. At the social change setting, the connection was to the volunteers' gay male community, and/or a connection to "the team," the work and project groups that characterized the setting. At the information/referral setting, there was also a connection to fellow volunteers, but respondents also spoke of a more abstract and impersonal connection to a social issue or to the diversity of the Bay Area. At the individual support setting the connection was without exception the one-on-one relationship with the client.

Another common theme in continuing motivations was coping; that is, the ways that involvement has helped the volunteers deal with the pandemic's effects on their lives and/or communities. Continuing motivation was also fueled by the learning of skills and leadership. Experience of leadership was prevalent at the social change setting, not mentioned at all the information/referral setting, and mentioned by only three respondents (all males) at the individual support setting.

These reported motivations, like those reported for initiating involvement, relate to setting services and activities. However, the effects of structure and role opportunities are more apparent in volunteers' reports about the benefits and experience of continued participation. That is, the more purely interpersonal character of the work at the individual support setting is am-

plified by a structure that increasingly limited role opportunities and participation in decision making, and offered few chances for collaborative action among volunteers. Conversely, aside from a strong identification with the community served and from which its volunteers were drawn, the social change setting offered participatory decision making, flexible structure, and open-ended opportunities for initiating projects that amplify the sense of collective, collaborative, and transformative action. These factors may also account for the overall higher endorsement of scaled motivations at this setting.

### *Personal and Political Efficacy*

Table VI reports by-setting means and standard deviations, ANOVA, and pairwise (Tukey's HSD) comparisons for measures of external and internal political efficacy, general self-efficacy, and mastery. Although a trend was apparent for internal political efficacy ( $p < .10$ ), only external political efficacy significantly differentiated settings ( $F = 3.19, p < .05$ ).

The contrast between the individual support and social change settings accounted for most of the variance, with levels lowest at the social change setting and highest at the individual support setting. Bandura's (1973) activist characterization applies at the social change setting, where external political efficacy was low, and internal political efficacy was fairly high. These two scales were rated about evenly at the individual support setting, not particularly supportive of the Serow (1991) hypothesis. General self-efficacy and mastery were high and did not differentiate settings.

### **Motivations and Efficacy in Context**

#### *Quantitative Analysis: Efficacy as a Function of Motivation and Setting Interactions*

We hypothesized that the relationship between motivations for volunteering and political efficacy would be moderated by setting, or conversely, that setting choice might indicate different attitudes or expectancies about political involvement depending upon volunteer motivations. On the basis of multiple regression analyses, the two measures of personal efficacy (mastery, total  $R^2 = .19$ ; general self-efficacy, total  $R^2 = .12$ ) were not significantly related to the scaled motivations nor to motivation-by-setting interactions. Internal political efficacy (total  $R^2 = .25$ ) also was not significantly related to motivations or setting-by-motivation interactions.

However, external political efficacy (the belief that social and political systems will be responsive to change efforts) was significantly related to

the interaction of setting and scaled motivations (total  $R^2 = .40$ ; Table VII). Setting-by-motivation interactions added about 25% to the accounted for variance, partially confirming expectations. Although no single contrast reached significance, the contrasts between the information/referral setting and the individual support settings showed the strongest trends. External political efficacy was higher for volunteers with high "community concern" motivations at the information/referral setting ( $r = .43$ ), but lower for volunteers with high "community concern" motivations at the individual support setting ( $r = -.52$ ; for the contrast,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F = 2.84$ ,  $p < .08$ ). The same direction and pattern of relationships was found for Esteem Enhancement motivations, with nonsignificant differences again occurring between the information/referral and individual support settings. Scaled motivations may differentially predict levels of external political efficacy at the individual support and information/referral settings, but appear to be unrelated to these beliefs at the social change setting. The analysis does offer support for differing relationships between motivations and external political efficacy across different settings.

These differential patterns across the settings raised the possibility that sex (and/or sexual orientation as these two "variables" overlapped to such an extent) may account for differences in political efficacy across the settings, as all of the social change volunteers were male. Multivariate regression analysis of sex as predicting the four efficacy measures showed no significant relationships (Wilks's  $\lambda = .274$ ;  $F = 1.32$ ,  $p > .10$ , ns). However, in this sample there is no way to completely separate setting and sex effects, and such a separation may not be particularly meaningful if we assume that demographics represent an embedded aspect of setting.

#### *Qualitative Analysis: Thematic Interrelationships*

The qualitative data are summarized in Table II. They amplify and contextualize the distinctions across settings in volunteers' scaled motivations and beliefs about political efficacy. External political efficacy was lowest at the social change setting where all scaled motivations were highest, and where reported motivations were both personal (social networking) and political (social action). This setting was also characterized by a strong identification with its urban gay community and by high levels of participation in the sociopolitical environments of both the setting and the community. Therefore, the combination of high levels of both personal and more political motivations with low levels of external political efficacy must be interpreted in the context of a setting that provides for experience and a "critical awareness of the sociopolitical environment" (Zimmerman et al.,

Table VII. External Political Efficacy as a Function of Motivations and Setting

Step/predictor variable	$R^2$	$R^2$ -change	$F$	$F$ -change
Criterion: external political efficacy				
1. Setting membership	.083		3.52 <sup>a</sup>	
2. Motivations (entered as block)	.138	.055	1.95	1.16
3. Setting $\times$ Motivations (interactions)	.397	.259	2.40	2.74 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> $p < .05$ .

1992) and of the setting's and volunteers' strong gay identification. This identification arguably provides historical logic for skepticism about the responsiveness of political systems.

Conversely, external political efficacy was highest at the individual support setting where all scaled motivations were lowest, and where personal loss was the sole reported motivation for volunteering. Volunteers also spoke of their work and experience primarily in terms of personal relatedness (see Table II). Decreasing role and decision-making opportunities and the one-to-one nature of services would reinforce a personal understanding of participation by offering relatively few opportunities to acquire experience or an understanding of the political and structural features of the pandemic. Although there was a considerable gay male representation among the volunteers (36%) and leadership at this setting, volunteers were more heterogeneous and older than at the other settings (see Table III). It is also a suburban setting lacking a clear identification with gay or other minority communities that might politicize engagement or perceptions. These factors appear to account for the lower levels of the scaled motivations, higher levels of external political efficacy (or political credulity), and the trend toward lower internal political efficacy.

At the information/referral setting external political efficacy levels were about intermediate to the other settings, and scaled motivation levels closer to those at the social change setting. Reported motivations emphasized the personal (personal loss) and a not strictly personal, not precisely political desire to educate both self and others. The setting combines individual and community levels of intervention, and many volunteers discussed their work in terms of gaining a sense of "the big picture" and connection to "what is going on in society" (Table II). However, the setting provides little opportunity for active participation in the political environment of the organization or communities, although it does seem to offer a sense of volunteer solidarity (Table II). The mixture of education and a one-person-at-a-time connection to diverse communities with the limited

scope and role opportunities offered at this setting may account for the intermediate levels of external political efficacy and a trend toward higher levels of internal political efficacy seen here, as might the setting's urban location and its mixture of gay men (68%) and heterosexual women (Table III).

## DISCUSSION

The three AIDS organizations examined here each attracted distinct groups of volunteers in terms of age, gender ratio, sexual orientation, and attitudes. The goals of these settings also differed, offering volunteers different role opportunities and experiences. Using scaled measures and quantitative analyses, volunteer motivations were found to differ by setting in overall levels. However, contrary to our hypothesis, the different aspects of motivations cohered, with three motivations (community concern, esteem enhancement, and personal development) rated significantly highest at the social change and information/referral settings, and lowest at the individual support setting. Regarding perceived efficacy, external political efficacy (faith in the responsiveness of the system) was significantly higher at individual support setting than at the social change setting. Supporting Bandura's (1973) activist characterization for social change volunteers, there was also a trend toward higher levels of internal political efficacy (faith in one's ability to understand the system) at this setting, with lower levels at the individual support setting. In line with its educational focus, the information/referral setting also showed high levels of internal political efficacy. However, neither setting characteristics nor volunteer motivations alone predicted reported political efficacy. Instead, external political efficacy was best explained by the joint contribution of setting characteristics and volunteer motivations. That is, external political efficacy was higher for high "community concern" volunteers at the information/referral setting but lower for high "community concern" volunteers at the individual support setting.

Both supporting and qualifying these the findings, qualitative analyses underscore the complex and embedded nature of setting and volunteer differences; unique cultures existed for each setting. That is, the three AIDS organizations attracted different people and engaged them in different activities and different relationships with the setting, each other, and the community. They did so in ways that make separating gender, sexual orientation, and age from setting difficult if not meaningless. Therefore, the best way to address the findings is to tell the setting, rather than variable, stories.

The social change volunteers were younger, and all gay or bisexual males. Both setting and volunteers were strongly identified with and embedded in their urban gay community and its history. This identification is reflected in motivations that were both political and personal, as were the setting's open collaborative structure and diverse role opportunities. For these volunteers there was a relatively seamless connection of setting, community, and personal identity.

Volunteers at the information/referral setting were predominantly gay male, but a third of respondents were heterosexual women. Rather than an identification with a single community or a strictly personal relationship as at the other two settings, there was an emphasis at this setting on both a one-to-one empathetic relationship and connecting to diverse communities. This fits with the broadly targeted hotline format, as well as the volunteers' identification of education of self and others and of personal loss as motivations for participation. Volunteers expressed appreciation for their training and also for their fellow volunteers as sources of support. The education and empathy emphasis in reported motivations, and a setting that emphasized these factors while simultaneously limiting role opportunities, were all reflected in an understanding of engagement that was personal and social, although not political per se.

Volunteers at the individual support setting were predominantly female, older, and about half heterosexual. The setting was suburban, had a broad, nonspecific outreach focus, and was not identified with any particular community. Reported motivations and perceptions of work emphasized personal loss and personal relatedness. Decision making and role opportunities were increasingly limited at this setting, which amplifies volunteers' identification of the client relationship as primary and a relatively weak identification with fellow volunteers or the setting itself. These factors, along with a larger number of older, heterosexual volunteers, support an understanding of participation and of the pandemic in primarily personal terms.

That the scaled motivations cohered, were all highest at the social change setting and all lowest at the individual support setting, can be interpreted in different ways. It may be that they all had greater relevance (but the same rank ordering) for volunteers at the gay male social change setting, where the stakes were arguably higher and activities more diversified. Conversely, all the motivations may have held less relevance at the individual support setting where an experience of loss to AIDS was the unanimously reported motivation for volunteering (the scales did not directly address this issue), and where stress of professionalization and decreasing role opportunities may be influences on motivations. It may simply



be that the subscales were strongly intercorrelated because they did not get at important distinctions and meanings for these volunteers.

In regard to the measures of political efficacy, these appear to capture beliefs and experiences that influence setting selection and expectations for participation, rather than just effects of participation in a setting. It was degree of faith in the responsiveness of social and political systems to change efforts that distinguished the settings, with more skeptical activists populating the social change setting. These were also the volunteers who saw their involvement in terms of community-level action and change, but for whom there was strong personal identification with this community; that is, the political was personal at this setting. Volunteers at the other two more individual-focused and less community-identified settings discussed their motivations and work in more strictly personal terms, though levels of external political efficacy were fairly high for these volunteers. It is hard to say from the measures who has the more “critical awareness of the sociopolitical environment” (Zimmerman, 1989), but given the history of the pandemic and of gay civil rights efforts, the social change setting volunteers’ skepticism seems realistic. It seems necessary, then, to interpret the measures of political efficacy in terms of personal and community history and as influencing setting selection. Volunteers’ accounts suggest that while the personal and political may be intertwined—participation seems to be always a matter of personal resonance—only the volunteers at the social change setting discussed their motivations in explicitly political terms. That is, for these volunteers participation was always personal but was not always conceptualized as political, and the distinction did relate to setting goals and activities.

These findings underscore three unique but related stories. They also argue for a contextual approach in which qualitative and quantitative approaches can inform one another in understanding participation and empowerment. The settings created and were created by different cultures and thus, variables differed in meaning, salience, and relationships across settings. Ready-made measures, the motivation scales for instance, did not capture volunteers’ experience fully or sensitively and did not lend themselves to straightforward interpretation. That said, however, the scales and their analyses did add to the study. We did find a setting-moderated relationship between the scaled motivations and external political efficacy: Volunteers with the same motivations (in this case, high community concern) had different beliefs about political systems (high or low external political efficacy) at different settings (also reflective of the different approaches to diverse communities at these settings). External political efficacy also meaningfully differentiated settings, in particular illustrating a certain pattern of political beliefs or attitudes for social change volunteers.

### *Limitations*

There are several limitations on the findings. The sample was small, which severely limited statistical analyses and power. A larger sample might have bolstered the strength of the standardized measures in capturing meaningful relationships within and across settings. In part, this was a function of AIDS organizations and their careful protection of the confidentiality of their volunteers and clients; access was restricted and many volunteers were wary of researchers. Access issues also affected our response rate (50%); the sample was composed of the most active, highly involved volunteers at each setting. In some ways, these volunteers are of particular interest, but they may not be representative of all the setting volunteers, or of AIDS volunteers in general. Still, this sample provided a great deal of valuable, relevant information in fairly extensive qualitative responses. Another possible limitation is the fact that gender and sexual orientation were confounded here and both were confounded with setting, making it difficult to tease apart the effects of each of these. On the other hand, AIDS volunteers tend to be heterosexual women and gay and bisexual men (Patton, 1990). Also, the differences in demographics appear to be embedded setting differences, related to differences in setting activities, goals, and location. Teasing apart these factors seems not particularly relevant given our focus.

### *Conclusions and Future Research*

If empowerment must be defined culturally and contextually (e.g., Zimmerman, 1995), so must other terms of participation. The three settings, all AIDS organizations in one area, differed in complex ways—community context, history, inhabitants, structure, goals, and focus—such that motivations and beliefs about participation had different meanings at each. A “political” reading of participation applied at only the most politically oriented setting—the “unconventional” activists, but participation was highly personal at all settings. However, this says nothing about the importance of participation or effectiveness of the settings; they all seemed empowering in their own ways. The findings support the idea that research on and creation of a diversity of settings (or “vehicles for empowerment,” Riger, 1984) should be our interest. The findings also emphasize that issues of identity are fundamental in AIDS prevention, services, and activism, and so for research in this area. Some long-standing and emerging issues include The “de-gaying” and “re-gaying” of AIDS (King, 1993; Weeks, Aggleton, McKevitt, Parkinson, & Taylor-Linbourn, 1996); the rapid increase

of cases in communities of color and women; the fact that AIDS volunteerism has created a coalition of heterosexual women and gay men; and, the increasing professionalization and homogenization of AIDS prevention and support services that, in trying to make services appropriate for everybody, may be appropriate for nobody (e.g., Patton, 1996). These issues only underscore the complexity of volunteer participation in AIDS organizations and the need for contextual approaches to their study.

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