

**VOICES FROM THE GRASSROOTS: A PUBLIC HEALTH FRAMEWORK FOR
CONDUCTING COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN POST-
KATRINA NEW ORLEANS**

by

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This paper explores the perspectives of grassroots organizers currently engaged in community work in Post-Katrina New Orleans to suggest a framework for Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Engaging grassroots organizers in CBPR projects can prove an invaluable resource as they have longstanding relationships with community members and a proven commitment to the communities they serve. To gain entrée necessary for carrying out CBPR in partnership with grassroots organizers in this context, researchers must foster genuine relationships that serve to empower community members and are not predicated on university obtained degrees or paternalistic ideas of community engagement. Specific to Post-Katrina New Orleans, grassroots organizers have a great deal of insight to share on the state of the city's recovery, why this work is important to the city's devastated communities, and how researchers interested in engaging their communities can be most effective. The framework presented is based on the principles of CBPR and enhanced with special considerations raised during interviews with grassroots community organizers in Post-Katrina New Orleans. This thesis is significant to public health because it serves not only to strengthen Community-Based Participatory Research in the city of New Orleans, but it could set a precedent for the field of Public Health related to their role in post-disaster recovery in any community for years to come.

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PREFACE

I would like to thank God and my ancestors for ordering my steps and leading me with divine protection and grace into each new phase of my life.

To my parents, Herbert and Cheryl Wing, my grandparents Estelle and Ulysses Connor, my entire family, and friends for all of your love and support throughout the years. I learned to love education and community through following your example. I dedicate this thesis to all of you and to those who have yet to be born into our lineage.

To my extended family in Atlanta, Ndugu and Nzinga, you taught me what it meant to be an adult. You helped to not only usher in the growth and recognition of my spiritual gifts but the gift of womanhood. Thank you all for your constant examples of uncompromising standard, discipline, and accountability I would never have made it through this phase of my life without them. Osizwe thank you for dedication, I couldn't have had a more divinely ordained fundi.

To Dr. Loretta Pyles of Tulane University for your vision and dedication to the research project and your willingness to assist me in my vision for this thesis work. To my entire thesis committee, Dr. Jessie Burke, Dr. James Butler, and Dr. Harvey White, thank you for your continued support and guidance during this process.

Finally, and most important, I would like to thank all of the grassroots organizers in Post-Katrina New Orleans for their passion and all of the work that they do. I hope that I represented your struggle with humility and integrity.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

On August 29, 2005, the city of New Orleans, LA was ravaged by a storm surge created by a hurricane of epic proportions, Hurricane Katrina. The city's residents have been engaged in a very public two-year struggle to reconstitute their lives in the city that they love. Post-Katrina New Orleans is a unique place. The boundaries created through traditional research relationships have in some ways been suspended in order to provide useful and necessary assistance to extremely devastated communities (Colby-Bottel, 2005, Pyles, 2006). This thesis is an examination of the emerging body of literature concerning the social aspects of Post-Katrina New Orleans, interviews conducted with community organizers working in New Orleans prior to and after Katrina, and literature on Community-Based Participatory Research to suggest a framework for researchers interested in engaging these communities. A Post-Katrina CBPR framework primarily serves to redefine the roles of researchers interested in engaging communities in New Orleans.

The overall goal of this research paper is to suggest the development of a framework for Community Based Participatory Research in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Toward fulfilling this goal this framework is informed by 3 specific aims:

1. To examine the characteristics of grassroots organizations and organizers, who worked in both Pre and Post-Katrina New Orleans.

2. To give voice to grassroots organizers and their thoughts and opinions related to partnerships with researchers in Post-Katrina New Orleans.
3. To suggest the development of a specific framework to guide future CBPR in Post-Katrina New Orleans and other communities ravaged by catastrophic events.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

“People not interested in helping with recovery will be of little use to communities faced with urban devastation unlike any other in US history ...This complicates the ethical picture for a researcher worried that her presence will unduly ‘affect’ the world of her research subjects. After Katrina, it seems that I do not have the luxury of avoiding these discussions” (Colby-Bottel, 2005).

This literature review examines four conceptual ideas based on the emerging research concerning Post-Katrina New Orleans. First, literature that describes the population, demographics, and social conditions of Pre-Katrina New Orleans is presented. Second, literature on Post-Katrina New Orleans examines issues of population and demographic change, response and recovery, medical and public health infrastructure, as well as community and grassroots organizing. Finally, literature on community partnerships and collaboration in CBPR will be presented.

2.1 PRE-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

This section examines the population and demographic themes in Pre-Katrina New Orleans and is an examination of the city’s pre-existing social conditions prior to Hurricane Katrina.

2.1.1 Population & Demographic Trends

Pre-Katrina, New Orleans' reported population was just under 500, 000 (US Census, 2004). The demographic information describing the city's population in this section will specifically focus on three areas, race, income, and industry distributions in Pre-Katrina New Orleans.

Race Distribution:

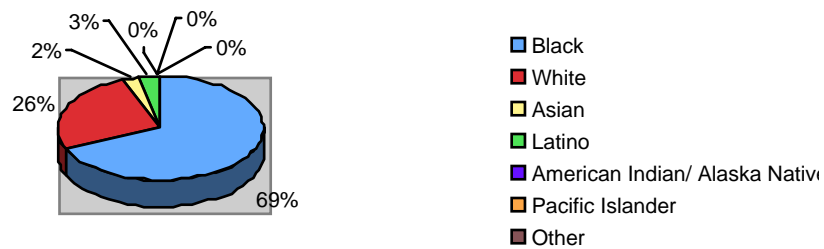


Figure 1: Race in Pre-Katrina New Orleans (US Census, 2004)

The population of New Orleans, LA prior to Hurricane Katrina was estimated to have been 444,515. Of the total population, African Americans accounted for 69% of the population or about 300,000 residents. The second largest proportion of the city's racial make-up was found to be Caucasians who comprised 26% of the population or about 115,000 residents (US Census, 2004). The figure illustrates the differences in household income and assets in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina. As this graph shows, of the total 180,000 households surveyed, about a quarter of the city's population was earning below \$15,000 per year (US Census, 2004).

Income distribution:



Figure 2: Income in Pre-Katrina New Orleans (US Census, 2004)

The following figure illustrates the specific industry categories that generated income in Pre-Katrina New Orleans. The category of social services comprised the largest portion of employed people. Social Services include professionals in the fields of education, healthcare, and social assistance. The smallest category (1%) was in those jobs related to agriculture (US Census, 2004).

Job Industry Distribution:

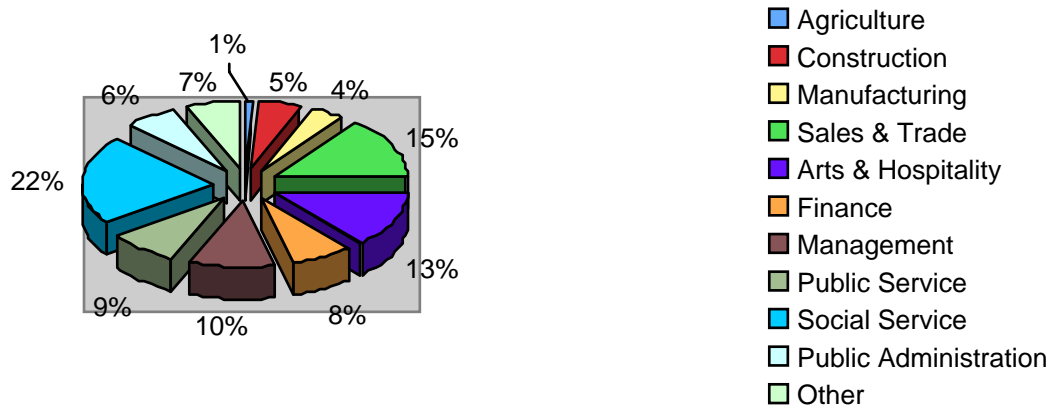


Figure 3: Job Industry in Pre-Katrina New Orleans

2.1.2 Pre-Katrina Social Conditions

New Orleans is an American city with a number of unique societal and cultural characteristics (Colby-Bottel, 2005; Falk, 2006). It “has the highest concentration of historic structures in the nation” (Connolly, 2005). The city boasted a total of “20 districts on the National Register of Historic Places covering half the city” (Connolly, 2005). New Orleans is considered the birthplace of Jazz, a city with one of the most unique culturally and racially mixed populations, and a regular party town where tourists can release their inhibitions (Falk, 2006). These descriptions definitely represent one side of New Orleans; however, by examining the lives of many of the city’s residents there is another, much different, New Orleans (Falk, 2006). The other New Orleans is a place of major social oppression, race and class struggles, and economic disparities that rival and even surpass many of the nation’s urban areas (Falk, 2006; Muhammad, 2006; Pyles, 2006).

“Before the flood, this highly profitable vision [of gentrification] was already displacing thousands of poor African-Americans: While their music and culture was for sale in an increasingly corporatized French Quarter (where only 4.3 percent of residents are black), their housing developments were being torn down” (Klein, 2005).

2.2 POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

Hurricane Katrina descended on the southeast coast of Louisiana on August 29, 2005. The literature in this section examines the massive flooding associated with the storm, the mass displacement of the city's residents, and the effects of race and class during the disaster.

“Indeed, a person's social and existential identity is to some degree, a by-product of where they live. They are in part *who* they are because of *where* they are” (Falk, 2006).

2.2.1 a. Massive Flooding & Displacement

One of the most talked about neighborhoods in both the scholarly and popular literature since Hurricane Katrina is the lower ninth ward (Connolly, 2005; Falk, 2006; Muhammad 2006). Pre-Katrina the lower ninth ward was almost all African American (Connolly, 2005; Muhammad, 2006).

“Originally a cypress swamp, the community of 20,000 is overwhelmingly black; more than one-third of residents live below the poverty line, according to the 2000 census. The people of the Lower Ninth are the maids, bellhops and busboys who care for New Orleans tourists. They are also the clerks and cops now helping to get the city back on its feet. The ward is home to carpenters, sculptors, musicians and retirees” (Connolly, 2005).

The demographics of the lower ninth ward neighborhood of New Orleans Pre-Katrina, was not uncharacteristic when compared to the rest of the city (Falk, 2006; Muhammad, 2006).

“Of the 160,000 buildings in Louisiana declared ‘uninhabitable’ after Katrina, a majority are in the New Orleans neighborhoods that suffered extensive flooding” (Connolly, 2005).

The city’s most socially disadvantaged neighborhoods most of work force in areas of education, tourism and hospitality, and the health professions (Connolly, 2005; Falk, 2006). This mass displacement of residents affects the city’s demographics, but also directly influences its culture (Colby-Bottel, 2005). Figure four shows the overall population displacement of New Orleans before and after Hurricane Katrina (US Census, 2006; Stone, 2006).

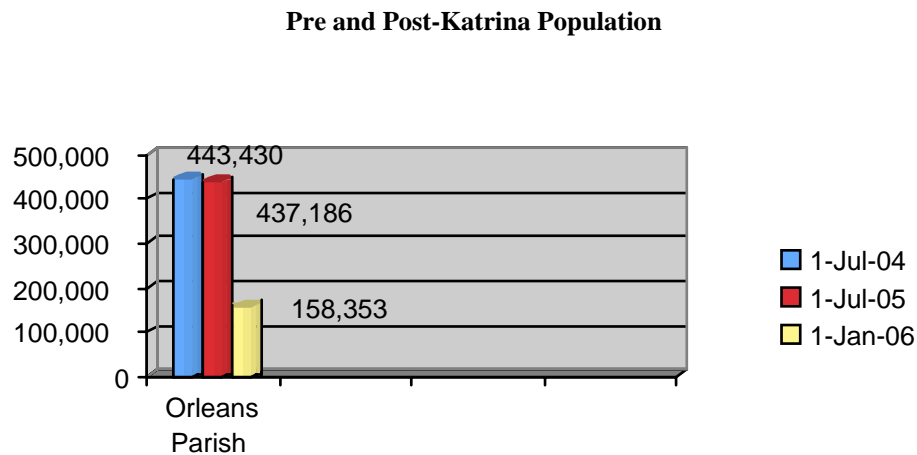


Figure 4: Population Change of Orleans Parish (US Census, 2006; Stone, 2006)

The demographic shift in New Orleans after Katrina continues to fluctuate from day to night (Stone, 2006). In the areas affected by the flood, the daytime population in January 2006

was estimated be about 100, 000 residents while the nighttime population was estimated at 45, 000 residents (Stone, 2006).

2.2.2 Race & Class

The proverbial “elephants in the room” whenever discussing Hurricane Katrina’s impact on New Orleans are those of race and class (Drier, 2006; Falk, 2006; Fletcher, 2005; Klein, 2005; Muhammad, 2006; Pyles, 2006). Hurricane Katrina changed the racial and class dynamics of the city drastically (Falk, 2006). Katrina had a markedly disproportionate affect on African Americans and those communities throughout the city of New Orleans composed of middle and working class people (Muhammad, 2006; Pyles, 2006). The implications of importance of race, culture, and class are essential components to understanding the social fabric of New Orleans (Colby-Bottel, 2005; Falk 2006). These considerations are also imperative in reconstituting the city and supporting New Orleanians in their efforts to recover what has been lost, Post-Katrina (Drier, 2006; Falk, 2006; Muhammad, 2006).

Race and class considerations in Post-Katrina literature usually begin with vivid descriptions of the mass exodus of the city’s less affluent citizens (Falk, 2006; Muhammad, 2006; Pyles, 2006). And some suggest that, “the disaster's starkest lesson is that African-Americans cannot count on any level of government to protect them” (Klein, 2005). Questions of race and class are seemingly intrinsic paradigms to be linked to Hurricane Katrina’s impact on New Orleans (Falk, 2006). The social disparities acknowledged in this disaster suggest:

“Hurricane Katrina served to expose and then further widen the pre-existing racial, economic, and cultural gaps in “a population already left behind by government, civic, and corporate leadership” (Quinn, 2006).

2.2.3 Response & Recovery

Post-disaster recovery is extremely delicate and nuanced (Steury, 2004). The severity of the disaster often dictates the magnitude of the recovery process (Lang, 2006). The recovery process in Post-Katrina New Orleans has been riddled with media coverage of the mismanagement of the disaster on all levels of government (Amoss, 2005). The political “failure of leadership” has directly impacted the city’s ability to recover (Drier, 2006).

“In truth, no municipal government has the capacity to handle a disaster of Katrina’s magnitude. Only the federal government has the resources to deal with the prevention, rescue, and rebuilding of the areas faced with major disasters” (Drier, 2006).

Support agencies are extremely vulnerable in the months immediately following a disaster (Lang, 2006). This results in their inactivity and inability to effectively help those most affected (Kaniasty 1993; Norris, 1996, 2001, 2005,). Despite the political and social vulnerability and breakdown, it is important to note that experts in the field of disaster recovery assert that, “no large city in the last 200 years failed to rebuild no matter how dramatic the destruction” (Lang, 2006). Rebuilding after a disaster requires that all stakeholders involved begin to understand the multi-faceted aspects of a particular community as they embark on the process of recovery (Kaniasty, 1993; Norris, 1996, 2001, 2005; Steury, 2004). This acknowledgment includes an awareness of not only disaster preparedness and urban planning, but also includes the consideration of rebuilding the community’s social fabric (Steury, 2004).

There are a few of considerations that make rebuilding infrastructure possible in Post-Katrina New Orleans, though a costly and a long-term investment (Colby-Bottel, 2005; Turner,

2006). In order to accomplish the goal of rebuilding New Orleans' social infrastructure and to realize even the smallest amount of structural change Post-Katrina, "emerging forms of social support and access to opportunity have to interlock" (Turner, 2006). As the city rebuilds policy makers must be concerned with the deliberate reconstitution of employment, affordable housing, public schools, young children, health care, arts and culture, and vulnerable populations (Turner, 2006).

"People's experiences with the Hurricane Katrina disaster have been vastly different depending on their location in society" (Pyles, 2006).

2.2.4 Medical & Public Health Infrastructure

Medical and Public Health professionals were some of the first voices from ground zero of the Gulf Coast to report their experiences at all stages of the disaster (Berggen 2006; Voelker, 2006). Given all of these challenges, the healthcare infrastructure in Post-Katrina New Orleans seems to be difficult, at best, to adequately assess (Quinn, 2006). Health services of all kinds are in major jeopardy, especially in the areas of mental and public health (Berggen 2006; Quinn, 2006; Voelker, 2006). There is also the paradox of the seeming deterioration of the mental health of New Orleanians in the face of a noted lack of mental health services provided in the city (Voelker, 2006). In a city as widely impacted by such destruction as Post-Katrina New Orleans, it is almost inevitable that:

"Physicians, first responders, and other health professionals are as vulnerable to the risk of suicide as the patients and citizens they have pledged to treat and protect" (Voelker, 2006).

Despite the challenges facing healthcare professionals and the bigger hospitals that continue to operate in and around the city, there are “two outpatient clinics serving the disenfranchised” that emerged to fill some of the structural gaps in the city’s healthcare system created in healthcare service delivery when the city’s only public hospital closed (Breggen, 2006). Both clinics were organized in Post-Katrina New Orleans to serve the healthcare needs of vulnerable populations. One of them even benefited greatly from its ability to “draw volunteer medical professionals from around the country” to serve New Orleanians though struggling against staff availability, increasing patient needs and decreasing capacity to provide services, lack of adequate private and public funding (Berggen, 2006).

“If we do not use this moment to address the underlying vulnerabilities of poor and minority communities, we will only perpetuate the social determinants that manifest themselves in health disparities and human suffering (Quinn, 2006).”

2.2.5 Community & Grassroots Organizations

Community organizers in Post-Katrina New Orleans have attempted to address many of the immediate needs of their communities including the provision of social support (Drier, 2006). Since Hurricane Katrina, a number of social services, political activism efforts, community mobilization activities, and relief efforts have been initiated and sustained by community organizers (Muhammad, 2006). Many grassroots groups stepped in “to demand a resident voice in rebuilding” (Blumenthal, 2005; Drier, 2006; Muhammad, 2006). Rebuilding after a disaster of this magnitude is complex for grassroots agencies because their focus areas and priorities change abruptly with each new area of need.

“Whatever positive things happen in the aftermath of Katrina will be due, in large measure, to the long-term work of grassroots community and union-organizing groups who mobilized quickly after the disaster struck to provide a voice for the have-nots and who found allies among urban planning, engineering, community-development experts to help formulate alternative plans to the development by business and political elites” (Drier, 2006).

The ability of grassroots organizers to mobilize effectively as well as to assess and respond to the needs of the people in a short amount of time in such monumental ways is a success for both grassroots organizations and healthcare professionals (Blumenthal, 2005; Breggen, 2006; Denham, 1998; Drier, 2006; Muhammad, 2006). Human rights approaches to work in Post-Katrina New Orleans borrow tenets from a number of strategies utilized in other countries (Pyles, 2006). Despite the inherent differences in worldview, they are applicable to Post-Katrina New Orleans because of the widespread poverty, lack of access and persistent violence that plagues both experiences (Blumenthal, 2005; Falk, 2006; Drier, 2006; Pyles, 2006).

“A human rights community practice orientation might include community education about human rights discourse and the identification of human rights abuses in local, national and global sites. Neighborhood organizing, grassroots internet efforts and other methods can utilize the language of human rights/capabilities as a way to influence the discourse of social change agendas” (Pyles, 2006).

2.3 COMMUNITY- BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The concept of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) in Public Health is one that promotes collaborative relationships between researchers and the members of a given community (Katz, 2004; Israel, 1998). This collaborative school of thought is rooted heavily in a social action and locality development approach as it attempts to address and improve the health outcomes of a given community (Foster, 2007). CBPR is defined as:

“Community-Based Participatory Research is defined as a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all of the partners in the research process acknowledging the strengths that each bring to the partnership. This approach begins with a research question of importance to community members and focuses on integrating knowledge and action for social change to address health issues” (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003).

Though this approach is exclusively employed in this paper, Community-Based Participatory Research is just one of many tools that can be successfully applied to conducting Public Health research in Post-Katrina New Orleans (Colby-Bottel, 2005; Pyles, 2006; Turner, 2006). Theories in participatory development and change are heavily based on the indigenous community’s understanding of their own assets and deficits (Castelloe, 2002; Denham, 1998; Daley, 1981). This understanding of one’s own community dynamics helps researchers to collaboratively develop solutions that can serve to address their particular research domains (Castelloe, 2002; Kretzman, 1993). These participatory methods have been used in a growing body of research intended to improve, among other things, a range of chronic and acute health

outcomes in a variety of community settings worldwide (Mosavel, 2005; Foster, 2007; Castelloe, 2002).

In CBPR, academic researchers are trained in community empowerment techniques encouraging community members to create sustainable changes as they improve their own health outcomes (Norris T, 2001; Daley, 1981; Lantz, 2001). These relationships require a great deal of cultivation and buy-in from community members before a project commences, a tedious reality that is necessary for success in community-based research and practice (Mosavel, 2005; Foster, 2007). CBPR has been used in devastated communities because of its targeted focus on community buy-in, trust-building, agenda-setting, empowerment, and community engagement make it a viable and in some cases, a crucial approach to engaging community members and carrying out research objectives (Mosavel, 2005; Castelloe, 2002). The crux of this approach, especially in areas recovering from disaster, is the creation of equitable and mutually beneficial community-researcher partnerships that leave the community empowered (Denham, 1998; Norris, 2001).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The qualitative data presented in this paper are a secondary data analysis of a research project conducted by a researcher employed by major university in New Orleans, LA. The study's Principle Investigator sent out mass alerts on a number of list serves to recruit Volunteer Research Assistants (VRA). The purpose of the study was to gather the histories, strategies, and activities of community organizers in New Orleans. This information was to be compiled in an online community resource available to the public once the project was complete. The project lasted 2 weeks, and required at least one full week of participation from each VRA. The VRAs were required to recruit, interview and transcribe interviews conducted with community organizers currently working in Post-Katrina New Orleans.

The recruitment process relied on convenience sampling methods with the intention of completing 25 interviews during the course of the project. Recruiters were given a list of community groups and neighborhood organizations compiled by an outside organization in the planning process of a citywide festival, which the aforementioned organization previously sponsored. VRAs were given a great deal of freedom in the selection of participants to be interviewed, but were diligent in attempting to compile data from a representative variety of community organizers and organizations in New Orleans. From this list, the initial contact, via telephone call, with community organizations and organizers began. VRAs were given a research script (see appendix) to guide their interviews, which typically lasted 90 minutes. These

interviews were audio recorded and all participants signed an informed consent before beginning the interview. All interviewees were provided with a copy of the questions, if requested, mailed transcripts of their interview once transcribed, and an honorarium of \$25 for their participation in the study. The tapes of the interviews, informed consent forms, and VRA notes were all to be kept in a locked file with limited access for 1 year and then destroyed.

The data included in this thesis were selected from the 25 interviews conducted in the original research study. These data were selected on the basis that the organizers interviewed identified themselves as working in a grassroots organization in existence prior to Hurricane Katrina. Organizations emerging Post-Katrina also had to follow the grassroots trend in addition to having leadership and a constituency of Pre-Katrina New Orleanians. Because of the criteria mentioned, there are 6 interviews from the total 25 conducted in the original research project and were analyzed in order to inform the formation of the proposed CBPR framework.

Methods for analyzing the data included iterative reading and listening to the complete interview transcriptions (Babbie, 2004; Miles, 1994). Those sections of the interview data included in this thesis were chosen because of the consistency in which the organizers communicated the importance of the response or theme they asserted. The discussion of a specific construct by all or at least five out of the six organizers was further examined through comparison to the other organizers responses, classified into a theme and included in this paper. Once this process was complete for each question included in the research script, it was followed for the emerging themes found in the data. These emerging themes were questions answered that were not explicitly asked in the research script including those related to role of the organizer and the importance of analyzing race, class and power in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Both the emerging themes and the responses to the research script shape the research question for this

thesis as well as the data presented in the results section. Once the research question was formed, the interviews were compared and contrasted with one another in order to develop more concrete conceptual ideas for developing a CBPR framework in Public Health. This method of analysis is consistent with the grounded theory method that utilizes the constant comparative method, both theories analyze data inductively, allowing for the formation of theory based on the examination of data (Babbie, 2004; Miles, 1994).

4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This analysis section first describes the demographic make-up of the organizers and organizations included in this study and then explores the organizers critiques of the presence of outside researchers and institutions in their communities, their analysis of race and class struggles in New Orleans, their motivations for continuing their work Post-Katrina, their roles as organizers, and the research questions that potential researchers should be concerned with asking when engaging communities in Post-Katrina research in New Orleans.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHICS OF ORGANIZERS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS

The organizers interviewed responded to questions about their own demographic backgrounds as well as those of key members in their organizations. Of the six organizers interviewed, two of them self-identified as White and the remaining 4 as Black. With regard to gender, four of the six organizers interviewed were men and the remaining 2 were women. While four of the six organizers interviewed reported having obtained college degrees at the time the interviews were conducted, all 6 reported receiving salaries of low income to moderate income. Some even adamantly identified themselves as “working class,” in order to make a clear distinction between themselves and those who identify with the middle class in New Orleans. Despite the racial, gender, and income diversity expressed by the organizers interviewed, all six reported having

memberships that were “mixed.” This mix of membership represented the organizer’s acknowledgement of a constituency that featured individuals from the many racial, gender, income and age groups that were present in Pre and Post Katrina New Orleans. The table below illustrates the demographic information of the organizers interviewed.

Table 1. Organizer Demographics

Organizer	Race	Gender	Income	College Educated
1	Black	Male	Moderate	
2	Black	Male	Moderate	
3	Black	Female	Low	X
4	Black	Female	Low	X
5	White	Male	Moderate	X
6	White	Male	Low	X

The organizers interviewed worked on behalf of organizations that addressed issues of human rights, social justice, and varying levels of neighborhood organizing and community redevelopment. Of the six organizations represented, two were primarily neighborhood-based organizations that organized residents from particular localities to disseminate pertinent information about Post-Katrina reconstitution, recovery and rebuilding. Three organizations primarily addressed social justice issues in the greater New Orleans area. The social justice issues addressed included voter registration drives, dissemination of information, facilitating the return of public housing residents to their homes and offering legal support to those who had been harassed by tenant councils in the city’s attempts to close the units, as well as organizing

“actions” against government officials and community rebuilding plans lacking community input. The last of the 6 organizations interviewed focused exclusively on race relations in New Orleans and abroad. This organization conducts intensive workshops that examine race and its impacts, supports a freedom school, and has a set of founders with an extensive organizing history in New Orleans, dating back to the 1960’s.

At the time of the interviews, three of the six organizations represented were considered non-profit organizations. This means that they had both filed for and obtained their 501-3C governmental status prior to the interview. One of the organizations represented was still in the process of filing for non-profit government status and the remaining two were not considered non-profits. The decision to become a non-profit organization, for some, was a strategic move to make their organizations more marketable to receiving public and private funds, a major concern with organizers. As one organizer noted:

“I think funding should come down to the grassroots level. There's goo-gops of money out here but it never trickles down to where it belongs.”

Despite the recognition of the perceived benefits, some organizations expressed little to no interest in gaining 501-3C status. Of the two organizations that had not been deemed non-profits at the time of the interview, one community organizer commented:

“We've demonstrated how it's possible to continue organizing at the grassroots level without having to ... delve into or submit to the non-profit structure.”

The table below illustrates the demographic information of the organizations represented in this paper.

Table 1. Organization Demographics

Organization	Social Justice	Neighborhood Organizing	Race Relations	Non-Profit
A	X			X
B	X			X
C	X			
D		X		X
E		X		
F			X	X

4.2 PRE-KATRINA VS POST-KATRINA

The impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans was profound. As mentioned in the methods section, five of the six organizations included in this paper existed in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina. Of the pre-existing organizations, all of them reported a shift in their priorities after the storm. This shift was largely representative the organizations desire to accommodate the changing needs of the citizens of New Orleans, though it did not have a drastic impact on their existing work, it necessitated the addition of more immediate tasks to be addressed in shorter periods of time. One organizer commented:

“my analogy is the emergency triage nurse, they determine who will see the doctor first, so we take the gun shot wounds that's what we do. The headaches, the other stuff, everybody else can have them.”

Organizers reported taking on such added tasks as gutting houses, registering people for the emerging federal assistance programs, voter awareness and registration campaigns, as well as initiating social activities for the members of their organizations. Organizers reported working as many as 90- hour weeks in the months immediately following the storm. Many of the organizers reported having to assume similarly hectic schedules at the time of the interviews, as the city's commemoration of Hurricane Katrina's 1-year anniversary was 2 weeks away. One organizer commented:

“You mean [how did we do it] during Post Katrina aw, Jesus Christ! Um, that was like hell months.”

4.3 THE ROLE OF THE ORGANIZER

In all of the interviews conducted, the organizers explicitly expressed the function of their role in their particular organization as well as in the larger recovery process. Though all of those interviewed expressed a commitment to Post-Katrina New Orleans and those affected by the storm's aftermath, they viewed their current roles as temporary. The role of the organizers as defined by the organizers themselves, was one of support, empowerment, and guidance for the communities they served. The organizers interviewed asserted the following perspectives:

“And as an organizer I’m supposed to, my job is to organize my way right out of a job, I’m supposed to be able to leave that group with them being self-sufficient and move to the next group.”

“I’ve been volunteering and I’ve been working 90 hour weeks since October...this organization exists only because--of these neighborhoods. I’d like to emphasize them.”

“you have to know the rules, organizing number 1 is to embarrass the system...the second step is an organizer should never take a leadership role. An organizer is to develop the leadership within that community.”

“If you want to teach people to organize, you have to empower people, you have to start with the people.”

“but it’s not gonna be [me as an organizer] coming in like you know, Captain America or something and saving the day, that’s not what’s going to happen here. Because that would dis-empower the person, that would dis-empower people in that community; then *I* have the power to change and *you* just have the power to sit back and say, [they] will fix it.”

4.4 PARTNERSHIPS WITH ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND RESEARCHERS

In each interview, the organizers expressed strong opinions about the presence of academic researchers and institutional partnerships in their communities. This section examines the concerns expressed by the community organizers interviewed regarding partnerships with academic institutions, researchers, and other institutions.

4.4.1 Negotiating Equity Between the Community and the Academy

All of the organizers interviewed reported having had previous experience with academic researchers at some point in their work. The organizers own experiences with academics led to a number of conversations in which they openly expressed their distrust of the academic process. Questions were raised and perspectives shared about the relevance of research for their own community, problems with less than equitable academic partnerships, and the unfulfilled promises in which these collaborations have resulted. The organizers interviewed expressed the following:

“The first thing that you must discover is that the decision makers in this process have to sit down with us. And that’s the first thing out of the shoot. It’s gotta be. Otherwise we’re not talking about grass [roots]...all they [academia] can do is raise resources and create the facility—but if they’re serious about grass roots organizing, they cannot run it.”

“Nothing is expected from the bottom, there’s no genius respected from the community; the only genius is now defined by the academy, if you didn’t go to the academy then you have no genius.”

“Let me tell you something, I’m confronted with this [often], nobody wants to elevate people in the community. They’ll bring somebody from out of your community, pay them sixty-thousand dollars to work in your community and you got to train ‘em...It’s my community, I know about it more about it than anybody.”

“So our message to the research project is the first thing you must discover is that the decision-makers in this process have to sit down with us. And that’s the first thing out the shoot.”

4.4.2 The View of “Outsiders”

The major concern of all of the organizers interviewed when considering academic partnerships was based on the academy’s general lack of respect for their work as grassroots organizers and its assertion of power in their communities predicated on their degrees. The tension resulting from researchers and other institutions usurping the work of grassroots people in the past serves to inform the way Post-Katrina researchers are viewed today. There is also an inherent belief held by the organizers interviewed, that many institutions have come into New Orleans initiating studies, policy changes, and interventions without properly gaining the insight of community members. The organizers interviewed asserted:

“It [my community work] was not predicated on my degree, and I think that’s the one thing that happens when people come to work in your community who have a degree, they want everyone to know about their degree.”

“Now part of what’s happening in New Orleans is that people are designing a program and ain’t talk to nobody...There’s nothing about [the university] that suggests that they’re in favor of grassroots people. Nothing, except as guinea pigs to be studied. We ain’t mad at no body, but we certainly have to belong to the community we serve.”

“you really don’t need credentials [to work in a community], you just get a group of concerned people who want to see things happen.”

4.5 THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY WORK

Community organizers in Post-Katrina New Orleans faced a number of obstacles in order to carryout the missions of their organizations. Not only do they continue to address the needs of others, they also deal with the reality that 5 out of the 6 organizers interviewed sustained some degree of damage to their own property during Katrina. But even with all of their personal struggles, when asked about the meaning of their work, all of them expressed sentiments of social responsibility and communal reverence. The following responses were poignant

declarations of dedication to their own work, the city of New Orleans, and those communities affected by Hurricane Katrina. The organizers expressed the following thoughts:

“It means freedom, it means justice, it means, I’ll go home and it means that, it means community to me.”

“[There is] a scripture that says, ‘to whom much is given much is required’ and at the end, if you read the end of it, it said, ‘if you knew more, you’re required more.’ So I said, ‘who would talk to Ms. Mary down the street [if I left]?’ ...And I’ve been here ever since... Lot of people can’t talk for themselves. I’m just blessed.”

“A lot of meaning, uh, a lot of significance, a lot of community, in fact in many ways if we define community by relationships people have, by knowing your neighbor, public housing [apartment communities] were the community in the city of New Orleans.”

“It means that communities--through struggle and through difficulty--find opportunity and find their soul and struggle to [for] provide themselves in a more resilient, healthier framework, healthier society, and the work means, literally, working with your neighbors, meeting your neighbors; Building new friendships and struggling to maintain and organize something that is maintainable, and possible to organize it.”

4.6 CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH FROM THE GRASSROOTS: THE ORGANIZERS PERSPECTIVE

The organizers were asked to suggest any possible research questions for those interested in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Half of the organizers interviewed expressed that the most important component of research, as far as they were concerned, were the people, purpose, and intentions behind the research questions that were informing potential studies. Two of the organizers commented:

“I think that it's important for students and for researchers, scholars, to ask the appropriate questions in any community and with any individual.”

“um, we need people asking the right questions, the critical questions, because politics are involved in research all the way down the line, from the questions you ask, the theories you use, methods, where your funding comes from, and what you use this - this information for.”

Concerns about the motivation behind potential research questions, once expressed, allowed the organizers to then make clear suggestions about considerations for potential studies. In an attempt to identify potential research questions, a set of organizers interviewed suggested a number of questions that generally served to summarize the questions suggested by all of the organizers interviewed.

“I think one important question they should ask is: the toll that privatization of public services is taking on the lives of - has taken on Katrina survivors...How is this uh, hurricane being used to put through an agenda like

privatization? What are the tactics that are being used? Who are the social actors that are - that are involved in this agenda? And then how is the resistance is emerging and how it can be strengthened?"

4.7 RACE AND CLASS IN POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

The organizers interviewed expressed a great deal of individual and collective concern for the state of race and class relations in the Post-Katrina recovery environment. Issues of race and class were raised in 5 of the 6 interviews. The community organizers commented on the struggles of race in class in a number of ways, from the lack of participation from one group of their constituents to the seething statements made by politicians who expressed sentiments of satisfaction related to the displacement of some of New Orleans' former residents. The organizers interviewed expressed the following:

"I would also say [we'd like to know] whether or not your organization has an analysis of history and race, and the constructs of institutional constructs within our society."

"Well we do work with low to moderate income people, and usually that's people of color and a man [of color] knows that if he gets up there and acts an ass, he's going to jail."

"We are against using this [Hurricane Katrina] as a form of class and ethnic cleansing - that's what we see them doing."

“We’re not afraid to speak to power.”

5.0 DISCUSSION

This discussion examines the various themes that emerged throughout the course of the interviews conducted and described in the results section. These emerging themes and existing literature will be used to inform recommendations that should contribute to a Post-Katrina Framework in Community-Based Participatory Research.

5.1 CULTURAL COMPETENCY, RACE RELATIONS, AND NEGOTIATING POWER IN POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

When considering any type of research project in Post-Katrina New Orleans, researchers must actively seek to challenge their own ideas of race, class, and power. Developing leadership and promoting empowerment in a post-disaster environment may be a challenging endeavor but will be further complicated if a researcher is not consciously working within and against the existing power relationships of the community (Vacroe, 2006; Alinsky, 1971). Many of the organizers interviewed had been trained in the organizing techniques of the Civil Right's Movement and those of Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* (Alinsky, 1971). This orientation to such literature and community organizing techniques contributed in part to the expression of their overwhelmingly honest observations on race and power struggles in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Though there was no formal question in the interview script that asked anything about race or class, at differing

points in their interviews the organizers interjected a consideration to one or both of these social constructs.

The job of the organizers, as they defined it, was to meet the communities where they were and build from there. This principle aligns itself most closely with CBPR. The cornerstone of Community Based Participatory Research is the desire of academics and other researchers to cultivate and sustain equal partnerships with community members (Wallerstien, 2006). In the interviews conducted, all of the community organizers were actively critical of the nature of their work. They spoke of their awareness of the presence of the fundamental differences that exist between themselves as organizers and the communities in which they work and seek to empower. This critical awareness contributed to their recognition that since they were temporary fixtures in the majority of communities in which they work. Though most of the organizers lived in the communities in which they did some of their work, they were deliberate in adhering to and promoting tactics that lessened their community's reliance on them as the sole producer of change. This attempt to decentralize the power of traditional relationships and form partnerships that empower communities is not without challenges.

Each community has its own unique culture and context in which they function, researchers must be ever mindful of the nuances that govern a particular community unit. For this reason, there is a necessity to articulate the importance of being culturally competent in the nuances of a particular community before engaging them in any intervention or research. The reality of race relations and power negotiations are important tenets to conducting culturally competent research in Post-Katrina New Orleans. As Gamble (1997) asserts, "African Americans' beliefs that their lives are devalued by White society also influence their relationships with the medical profession". This upfront and unabashed address of race and

power in Post-Katrina New Orleans, and other marginalized communities, can serve Public Health in a variety of ways from gaining entrée to further understanding the social and political stressors that affect health outcomes (Dein, 2006; Gamble, 1997).

5.2 WHY INVOLVE GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS IN CBPR?

Community-Based Participatory Research and Practice is rooted in strengths-based approaches when addressing health outcomes (Denham, 1998; Wallerstein, 2006). Through promoting equity in all facets of the partnership, methods to empowering communities, and promoting sustainability the inherent nature of this approach is one of capacity recognition and building (Minkler, 2005). Researchers should not assume that Post-Katrina New Orleans is a place lacking capacity. As the interviews clearly showcased, even as early as a month after the storm, these organizers were at ground zero revamping their efforts and contributing much needed services. Organizers consistently noted their commitments to the people of New Orleans prior to Katrina and their recommitments in the recovery effort.

The inclusion of grassroots people in the formation of research questions, proposals, and initial steps to carrying out a research project in Post-Katrina New Orleans serves a variety of purposes. Decentralizing the power in the relationships between academic researchers and community people is an essential step in conducting research in a post-disaster recovery effort. One of the greatest assets to grassroots organizations in New Orleans is their ability to identify countless successes. They hold the key to understanding their communities and have already proven themselves worthy allies. They are trusted community entities that pride themselves on

being transparent in a city with a long history of corruption and generational mistrust of outsiders.

During the course of the interviews, one organizer in particular was extremely invested in advocating and promoting the equitable partnerships between grassroots organizations and academia. The use of grassroots organizations in promoting Public Health can be achieved in many ways especially through the formation of community coalitions (Kaye, 2001). These coalitions can be invaluable resources that result, with the guidance of those at the grassroots level leadership, in sustainable community institutions (Chavis, 2001, Kaye, 2001). The organizers interviewed asserted that the challenge with promoting grassroots people as equal partners with academics is that scholars in the academy are not consistently being educated to serve communities as grassroots organizations are.

The reality that traditional research requires certain skill sets and credentialing that may be absent in some grassroots organizations was fully acknowledged by all of the organizers. Their major point of tension with research and researchers in their communities was that they felt used, de-valued, and dis-empowered by researchers who asserted agendas, predicated on the knowledge gained through university obtained degrees, without consulting the community. The most important skill a researcher can bring to community work with grassroots people is humility. Most of the organizers interviewed have dedicated their lives to grassroots work, so they carry with them a long legacy of experience that most academics simply do not have.

5.3 CONSTRUCTING A POST-KATRINA FRAMEWORK FOR CBPR

The purpose of this paper was to examine existing literature and the interview data in order to suggest the formation of a Post-Katrina framework to be used in Community-Based Participatory Research. This framework will serve to govern the interactions between academic researchers and community members, promote the incorporation of the grassroots into CBPR research, to highlight several constructs that should be included in the design of any CBPR research conducted in Post-Katrina New Orleans.

Community-Based Participatory Research in Post Katrina New Orleans should adhere to the following tenets:

1. All research should be subject to a full board Internal Review Board (IRB) Review.

The first recommendation is purely logistical and based on the comments of an interviewee upon completion of the interview when he was asked to sign an informed consent. He commented that this was his first informed consent, but his third interview with major universities since beginning his work in Post-Katrina New Orleans. In order to protect the vulnerable state of New Orleans and its people in this recovery phase, community-based participatory researchers and practitioners should call for the special consideration of New Orleans as a vulnerable population. Through acknowledging this vulnerability, all potential research should be recommended for full board reviews with their respective IRB prior to initiating any work.

2. Researchers should commit themselves and their time to contributing to the city's overall recovery efforts beyond the scope of their own research project.

The organizers interviewed were adamant in their recommendations that this recovery effort is long-term. They also suggested that academics interested in partnership should be committed to the place and people of New Orleans as and the recovery itself. Keeping the integrity of one's research at the forefront of their efforts does not have to compromise their efforts to contribute to the overall recovery efforts. Countless volunteer opportunities exist to take part in home gutting and rebuilding, organizing cultural festivals, participating in awareness building campaigns among other effort. This assistance is not only of great value but welcomed by all.

3. The research conducted and the tactics used should be asset or capacity based.

Community-based tactics like community capacity mapping, canvassing, photo journaling projects, and windshield tours should be conducted in addition to traditional methods of quantitative and qualitative research data. Though, as many organizers noted, community priorities and dynamics have changed so drastically since Hurricane Katrina researchers must not consider New Orleans a place with no existing capacities. Using capacity and asset based approaches to research and data collection will not only promote the work of the grassroots, and individual citizens, but will also serve to empower the community.

4. Research questions must be developed in collaboration with community members.

Developing research questions with community members is a key component of CBPR and should also be the foundation of any work in Post-Katrina New Orleans. It can also be used as a mechanism to gaining full participation with community members and grassroots organizers.

5. Any research conducted or scholarship produced should have an analysis of race, class, and power in its design.

Researchers should employ theories that examine the social construction of race, class, and power when constructing their research in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Confronting the historical race and class struggles that are part of the cultural fabric of New Orleans is an integral part of moving to a framework (Pyles, 2006). Having honest conversations about the effects of race, class, and power with communities can serve to strengthen the researchers own foundation in the interrelated stressors of life in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Researchers should also be cautious when making assumptions related to race, class, and power especially if they are unfamiliar with the nuances of New Orleans' cultural heritage.

6.0 LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation to this work lies within the minimal number of interviews conducted. Given the total number (25) of interviews conducted as a part of the original study and the criteria that formed the basis of this paper, the sample size of interviews conducted was extremely small and may not be statistically significant, generalizable, or consistent with the findings of a larger project. Despite the small sample size, this research paper is exploratory in nature and a guide for future research conducted with grassroots organizers after a natural disaster.

This thesis relies solely on qualitative data collected via convenience sampling techniques. A mixed methods approach may serve to uncover new concepts and clarify those presented here. Though this approach is limited, given the magnitude and time of the disaster more research with varied methods is necessary. Because this is an initial look into many concepts that have not been covered in this context, the methods, and sampling technique can serve as a foundation for future research.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Since there is a lack of scholarly research produced on the social impacts of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, more scholarly research needs to be conducted. The largest body of work produced can be found in the popular media such as newspapers, internet blogs, magazine articles and books that chronicle the personal experiences and professional opinions of a number of individuals from diverse backgrounds. Given the issues examined in this paper, it is recommended that more research be conducted to understand the social implications of post-disaster recovery.

If Public Health is going to be a vital and integral vehicle in rebuilding infrastructure in Post- Katrina New Orleans, researchers must consider moving toward formalizing a solid framework. This framework should articulate standards and methods of accountability that serve to improve and empower the communities of New Orleans. The utilization of the principles set forth by Community-Based Participatory Research serves as an adequate foundation for such a framework. Bringing grassroots organizations, academic researchers, and community members together to address the needs and build on the capacities of New Orleans in this unprecedented recovery effort could result in many possible outcomes. It will not only strengthen the city of New Orleans and the field of Public Health, but it could set a precedent for post-disaster recovery in other communities for years to come.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Understanding Post-Disaster Community Development:

A Study of Community Organizing Efforts in New Orleans

Name of Organization _____

Name of Interviewee _____

- I. Goals and Areas of Concern of the Organization
 - Substantive areas with which agency is concerned
 - Measures and indicators of success

- II. Internal Aspects of the Organization
 - Organizational beginnings
 - Organizational funding
 - General description of membership including demographics
 - Background of key leaders
 - Communication and coordination
 - Decision-making procedures

- Membership recruitment strategies
- III. Organizing and Advocacy Methods Used
- Method used to achieve goals
- IV. Self-Analysis of Organization
- Success story
 - Strengths and weaknesses of organization
 - Barriers to achieving goals
- V. Demographics and Follow-Up
- Gender, income, race, and age
 - What does this work mean to you?
 - What other research questions should we be asking in the future on the topic of community organizing and post-disaster revitalization?
 - Would you be open to being contacted for a follow-up interview?

APPENDIX B

RESEARCHER'S REFLECTIONS

As a native of New Orleans, this research was extremely hard for me. Though I saw the need to discuss many of the themes presented in this work, I was often frustrated on how to do so scientifically. I started my Master's program the day Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and I spent a week in every month of first semester in Houston with my newly displaced family.

What most people don't seem to understand about New Orleans is that it is the epitome of a small, southern, boutique town. Growing up there wet my appetite for adventure, culture, history, and life. It also served to make me keenly aware of poverty, political prowess, deprivation, and social unrest. The best and the worst of New Orleans has been on public display for almost 2 years, at the time this thesis will be complete, and it saddens me that a country so rich has served to further marginalize a city so conflicted.

During the course of conducting the interviews as a VRA and through writing this thesis, I have been ever critical of my investment in this issue and in Post-Katrina New Orleans. As the only New Orleans native on the research team, and only Black person, did my presence help hurt the integrity of the research? Was I too emotionally connected to the issue? After all, like most of New Orleans, my family lost everything in Katrina and had yet to rebuild. I didn't even drive by

my neighborhood or look at the house where I spent 17 years of my life until after the project was over. This process has been beyond difficult for me. How could I function in my Master's program while shedding light on Katrina and the issues that emerged, but not be the "Katrina Girl"? I'm not sure that any of these questions I asked myself ever got answered, but they served to make me a better researcher, and a better person.

Many of the community organizers touched me in ways unimaginable. I am so grateful to have interviewed them. They affirmed my belief that passion and research can coexist. So as a researcher I know that the process of constructing this thesis has been life changing. I hope that this work can contribute to strengthening the social fabric of New Orleans and the relationships between grassroots people and the academy, two existences in which I am personally and professionally connected.

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