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A CASE STUDY IN CITIZEN LEADERSHIP DURING CRISIS:

THE EXPERIENCES OF THE WOMEN OF THE STORM

A Dissertation in

Workforce Education and Development

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explores the experiences of members of the organization known as the Women of the Storm who in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, stepped into the vacuum of traditional leadership to bring members of Congress and funding to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. The research questions guiding this study center on leadership during times of crisis and sought to explore how the events related to Katrina influenced the rise to leadership of the participants. The study also explores the relationship of leadership formative and learning experiences among the participants as they relate to leadership development and its emergence in the wake of Katrina. The analysis of data resulted in the emergence of six primary themes: 1) the impact and extent of Hurricane Katrina and the ensuing crises, 2) the vacuum of leadership after Katrina and the ensuing consideration of what leadership means, 3) the role of Women of the Storm throughout the Katrina crisis, 4) the experiences related to leadership development, 5) the emergence of citizen leaders, and 6) networking among people. These themes were synthesized into four areas of discussion. First, the experiences and perspectives of the participants offer a unique, first hand, framework for exploring what leadership means in a time of crisis. Second, these same experiences begin to shed new light on the role of citizens and emergent organizations in times of crisis. Third, the participants' reflections on experiences related to leadership development provide a bridge between the ideas related to how leadership is learned and how these experiences become meaningful during times of crisis. Finally, the ability of the citizens to utilize and build new social networks demonstrates the value of social capital in times of crisis. The results reflect a need for further qualitative research into crisis leadership as well as the opportunity to further examine the leadership role of citizens in crisis situations.

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Over the past year I have met with many people in the course of this study. Despite months of reading, listening, and watching, it still remains impossible for me to imagine what it was like to be a New Orleanian and experience New Orleans in the wake of Katrina. In attempting to do so, I have often been simultaneously brought to tears and filled with rage. However, when I then stop and think about the women of the Women of the Storm, of the stories of bravery, sacrifice, and the unstoppable determination of the people of that wonderful city and those all around the world who came to help, I am filled with hope and admiration. In a world that seems all too often filled with greed, selfishness, and failed leadership, I found the people who became a part of this study and all of those I met in the process to represent that silver lining that we all so often long for and rarely find. Therefore, I would first like to thank the members of the Women of the Storm for allowing me to sit in, listen, and learn. Particularly, I would like to thank Anne Milling, Diana Pinckley, John Pope, and many others who opened their homes (especially the little pink ones) and their hearts to me. You are all truly inspirational.

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In closing, it is my sincere hope that while we all may keep an axe in our attics, that we, and the people of New Orleans, never have cause to use them again.

Chapter 1

Introduction

WE never know how high we are

Till we are called to rise;

And then, if we are true to plan,

Our statures touch the skies.

(Dickinson, 1924)

Background

On January 30, 2006, a sea of bright blue umbrellas washed up the steps of the Capitol

building in Washington, DC. These umbrellas were held high above the heads of 130 women

known as the Women of the Storm who had come to Washington, DC, to storm the halls of

Congress and bring attention to the desperate situation confronting New Orleans and the Gulf

Coast. The members of the Women of the Storm (WOS) had become increasingly frustrated

with the void of leadership in the months following Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent crises

that devastated the region. They were also fearful that this void of leadership in the face of so

much devastation would signal the end of New Orleans, the city they loved (personal

communication, August 5, 2009). Stepping in to fill part of this void, the members of WOS

focused their efforts on bringing substantial financial aid and attention to the region by working

with decision makers in Congress to address the ongoing crises in New Orleans and the Gulf

Coast. Their efforts resulted in a change of heart and, more importantly, changes in policy

within in the hard scrabble halls of Congress. They also inspired a dedication help the region

among the once indifferent members of that body. Case in point, prior to the first WOS visit in

January 2006, only a small percentage of the House (25 representatives) and the Senate (only 12 Senators) had been to the region after Katrina. In addition, many legislators had expressed little or no interest in seeing the devastation prior to the visit of WOS (Alpert, 2006; Tyler, 2007). Yet within two years, WOS were responsible for doubling the number of Representatives and Senators to visit the region and for turning the tide of opinion of many of the naysayers in Congress (Tyler, 2007). More specifically, the WOS also helped to secure an initial $4.2 billion into the region within the first year after they stormed Capitol Hill (Tyler, 2007).

From an initial meeting of six women seated around a dining room table in New Orleans on January 10, 2006 to the wave of blue umbrellas that washed up the Capitol steps on January 30, 2006, a movement was born. This organization was built upon the shoulders of a diverse group of leaders who emerged in the wake of Katrina. A message, vision, and plan of action were all developed in those first twenty days. Even the symbolic blue umbrellas, which were chosen specifically by WOS to serve as a reminder of the ubiquitous blue tarps covering the roofs of homes laid waste by Katrina, were envisioned during that brief period (David, 2008). The effect of all of the women and their blue umbrellas raised high, storming the Capitol steps was so imposing and so moving that the U.S. Senator from Louisiana, Mary Landrieu, said, "It looks like the cavalry is coming" (David, 2008).

This simple phrase described so succinctly what many in the Gulf Coast in general, and New Orleans in particular, had come to feel. They were living in a region still in crisis, yet the traditional leadership continued to fail them at all levels (H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006). These ordinary women, who in their daily lives had been housewives, business owners, lawyers, and administrators of nonprofit organizations, not only led their own personal battles throughout the

crisis but rose to lead the fight to bring attention and funding to a devastated New Orleans. They were the cavalry that rode into Washington to save what was left of their city and their culture.

The emergence of WOS and the pivotal role the group played in moving the mountain that was Congress toward responding to the ongoing crisis in the region, is a meaningful commentary on crisis leadership. WOS was one among a number of groups that emerged in a time and a place when traditional leadership was essentially nonexistent (Mann, 2006). Many of these groups emerged from the kitchens, dining rooms, and what was left of the homes of women throughout the city who became, as Mann (2006) describes "accidental activists" (p. 93) or as Tyler (2007) refers to as leadership "wearing lipstick and carrying a purse" (p. 1). The emergence of these groups is, in many ways, the reason behind a single, consistent refrain from the people of New Orleans—it was the citizens themselves who saved the city. Ordinary individuals from all walks of life saved the city through any means necessary.

The members of WOS are no exception. As individuals their leadership achievements are many and varied. All of these women as individuals became more than activists, they became leaders who addressed the multitude of crises brought on by Katrina. From gathering hundreds of thousands of tons of garbage that had been left to rot, to ensuring the integrity of those administering the levees, average citizens stepped up to lead in the void of leadership that characterized the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As members of WOS, their collective efforts were driven by strategic thinking and action, focus and vision, non partisanship, and collaboration within and among stakeholders. In addition, the members exhibited humility, self sacrifice, and a determination to move New Orleans and the Gulf Coast from crisis to recovery. They were able to change policy which brought in billions of dollars of recovery funds to the region (Tyler, 2007). Therefore, an exploration of WOS, its actions and experiences in this

vacuum of leadership, may provide a glimpse of what leadership can and should be in times of crisis.

Crises such as the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and more recently, the economic crisis that swept the globe in 2008, are vast in their geographic impact as well as their impact on society. Crises in the last century have been long-term events that often pose threats beyond a single organization and frequently overburden even the resources of national governments (Boin, 2004). There are no apparent timelines for when a crisis ends. Crises are "extended periods of high threat, high uncertainty, and high politics that disrupt a wide range of social, political, and organizational processes" (Boin & 't Hart, 2003, p. 545). Such is the story of Katrina. The tale of Hurricane Katrina and its impact on New Orleans is the tale of the ultimate modern crisis. Hurricane Katrina itself was a natural disaster. Yet this natural disaster turned into a manmade catastrophe when the levees failed and leadership proved nonexistent. This ill fated combination spawned multiple long term crises that had the potential to destroy a major American city ("Death of an American City", 2005).

Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent crises caused by the levee breaches were met with an official response that was limited and short-lived. However, it is not fair to say that this crisis was completely ignored. Leadership, from an unforeseen source, was palpable for a short time in the aftermath of the flooding of the city. This brief shining light in the dim trenches of leadership in the days that followed Katrina was Lt. General Russel Honore. Horne (2008) describes the scene:

>What the media wanted, of course, was a star—someone on whom to focus
>
>the yearning for effective leadership that seemed so sorely lacking among the

many politicians jabbering, finger-pointing, and blubbering on camera. And

briefly, at least—for as long as he could put up with it—the media had their

man in Lt. Gen. Russel Honore, the commander of Joint Task Force Katrina.

In a landscape crawling with double-talk, he was blunt, action-oriented, and

after a delayed start, capable of results. (p.103)

Despite the effort to secure the city, the depth and breadth of the crisis had yet to take

hold of the people. It was not until time passed and the cameras found other venues that the

realization hit the people of New Orleans that they were on their own. New Orleans in the

months after Katrina was described by a member of WOS as "the forgotten American city and

the location of one of the greatest crises to confront our country" (personal communication,

August 5, 2009). It was described in an editorial in the *New York Times*, months after Katrina, as

a city "We are about to lose" ("Death of an American City", 2005). In February of 2006, the

U.S. House Select Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane

Katrina released its final report, *A Failure of Initiative*. The report stated that "the committee

had identified failures at all levels of government that significantly undermined and detracted

from the heroic efforts of first responders, private individuals and organizations, faith-based

groups, and others" (H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006, p.1). At the same time in New Orleans, the

bodies of the dead were still being uncovered in the wreckage and chaos that remained

(DeBerry, 2006).

As a result of Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent failure of the levees, 80 percent of

New Orleans was flooded, 1800 deaths were reported and 800,000 residents were displaced

(O'Keefe, 2007; Schneider, 2008). In addition to the human cost, estimates of the economic

costs are staggering, approaching more than $200 billion in damages, and in the first year alone, 95,000 lost jobs (Dolfman, Wasser, & Bergman, 2007). According to Doflman, Wasser, and Bergman (2007), the primary economic strongholds for New Orleans prior to Katrina were tourism, port operations, seafood, oil and gas, and education. These areas were heavily impacted. However, losses were felt in every area of the economy including health care and manufacturing, particularly in the first year after the hurricane. Despite substantial data and the stories of the ongoing crisis, leadership was glaringly absent (H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006).

Problem Statement

The dramatic events of the last decade have helped to rekindle and reframe research in the field of leadership during times of crisis. The question of how leaders become leaders is an age-old question. Are leaders born or are they made? This concept has received significant attention and allows us to consider the idea that within all of us is the ability to lead when presented with the right opportunity and the right circumstances. Often, these opportunities come in the form of crises that can transform a commonplace manager, director, or even president into a leader of import, and permanently alter a community, organization, or society (Boin & 't Hart, 2003; Clair & Dufresne, 2007). Examples of the rise to leadership abound. From a seemingly mediocre president whose short, simple, yet brilliant speech on a battlefield in a small town called Gettysburg helped turn the tide of the U.S. Civil War to a Baptist minister from Atlanta whose words and deeds changed not only a society, but influenced the world, leaders have risen above the fray to overcome crises of culture, government, and faith.

Several key areas related to leadership during times of crisis have yet to be fully realized in the research literature. First, we have little understanding of how crises influence and

motivate individuals to assume leadership roles. For example, unlike the leadership responses to events such as September 11 and the economic crisis, which were characterized by forceful and coordinated action, direct communication, and a call for unified non partisan support, the responses of leaders throughout the Katrina were disjointed, partisan, and lacked vision and strategy (H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006). There was essentially a void of leadership at every level. Yet within this void, leadership emerged. This leadership came not from elected officials or government agencies; it came from the citizens. These citizens, who represented all walks of life, stepped into the leadership void to solve both immediate and long term problems created by Katrina. While traditional leadership seemed "tranquilized" and "obsessed with blame", citizens acted (Field notes, October 31, 2009). An exploration of this overwhelming response from average citizens such as the WOS, offers a new lens with which to view this phenomena.

Second, while there is growing interest in crisis leadership, there is a paucity of research on how individuals learn to lead effectively during a crisis. Kempster (2006), in a study of leadership learning described previous research in that area as having remained "at the level of empirical accounts and has not sought to illuminate the deep causes affecting leadership learning" (p. 4). There is a growing interest in crisis leadership but other than a limited number of empirical studies, most notably James and Wooten (2005) and Wooten and James (2008), there is little information that would enlighten or inform us. This lack of insight limits our ability to effectively understand how leaders, such as WOS, emerge during times of crisis and how they learn to lead. For example, what were the experiences in their lives that contributed to their leadership development? In addition, how did the crisis itself influence or motivate the individuals to lead? And in what manner, if any, are these experiences and motivations relevant

in the realm of leadership during times of crisis. Additionally, there is little research on the role

of non-traditional leadership when traditional leaders, such as those in elected office, fail to lead.

It was just such a vacuum of leadership that resulted in the emergence of organizations

such as WOS which helped move New Orleans from crisis to recovery. By exploring their

experiences and eliciting their perspectives it is possible on one level and in this specific crisis

context to gain insight into this complex human act.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the group of women that

comprise Women of the Storm (WOS) as related their leadership role in responding to the

Katrina crisis. This study considered the perspectives of the members of WOS through the lens

of the influence of the Katrina crisis, their leadership learning experiences, and their actions in

the context of leadership during times of crisis. The women's actions were characterized by a

nonpartisan, focused and strategic approach, and exemplified many characteristics of leadership

that should have been present in the traditional leaders at the time. They provide unique insight

into how to implement proactive responses to crisis situations. In exploring these experiences, it

is hoped that greater insight into leadership during times of crisis will be illuminated and our

understanding of crisis leadership and the role of experiences in building such leadership will be

gained.

Research Questions

This research was guided by an exploration that considered the following:

1. How did the events related to Hurricane Katrina influence and motivate the participants in relation to leadership?

2. What life experiences did the participants have that may have influenced their interest in taking a leadership role during the crisis?

3. How are the actions of the Women of the Storm relevant in the context of leadership during times of crisis and what can be learned from their experiences?

Significance of the Study

The context, Hurricane Katrina, and its aftermath, is considered one the greatest disasters in American history (Comfort, 2007). The physical devastation caused by natural and human forces is often compared to that of the bombing of Hiroshima (Horne, 2008). This long lasting physical devastation was the outward symbol of a more devastating lack of leadership and response from those in power. As stated previously, this lack of leadership was supplanted by leadership that emerged from the citizenry. These citizens came from all walks of life and often with little or no previous leadership experience. Yet they were able to assume leadership and make dramatic and meaningful change within New Orleans in the months and years after Katrina. Understanding how individuals learn to lead and what experiences contribute to the motivation to lead is an issue that has been debated since the times of Aristotle (Grint, 2007). According to Grint (2007), Aristotle believed that leadership qualities and subsequently the wisdom required to lead came not in the form of years, but in the form of experience and learning. This study explored this idea through the lens of the Katrina crisis and focused on the experiences of the group the Women of the Storm.

The experiences of WOS and the accompanying perspectives shared by the members of this group provide insight into influences that motivate individuals to lead during times of crisis. The study illuminates elements of leadership during times of crisis, specifically leadership that rises from a group such as WOS, and the impetus driving that rise to leadership. This supports a broader view of leadership during crises outside of the more common focus on for profit or government entities. As we continue to experience crises on the local, regional, national, and global levels, our existing insufficient information about the complexities of leadership during modern crises are likely to confront researchers and leaders alike. Endeavoring to enhance our existing knowledge will likely shine light on ongoing efforts to address and understand leadership in times of crisis.

Limitations

The limitations of this research are threefold. The research is limited by geography, by a focus on events related to Hurricane Katrina, and by the organization under exploration, WOS. The WOS organization was being studied from the vantage point of leadership during a crisis. The study did not focus on issues of gender, race, or culture as other studies of post-Katrina organizations have done (see David, 2008; Pyles & Lewis, 2007; and Tyler, 2006) The study limited its geographic area of focus, including fieldwork and observations to New Orleans. Although the impact of Katrina was felt well beyond New Orleans, it was not within the resources of this study to extend beyond this area In addition, the focus on experiences related to leadership development was guided by research in this area by Janson (2008) and Kempster (2006). It is important to note that due to limited resources the scope of this study was not include an examination of all leadership theories, styles, types, or characteristics nor was it

possible to focus on all types of learning experiences. The research was a case study of a single organization with multiple perspectives as they pertained to the Women of the Storm's leadership role during the Katrina crisis.

Definition of Terms

Crisis: For the purposes of this study, crises are defined as "extended periods of high threat, high uncertainty, and high politics that disrupt a wide range of social, political, and organizational processes" (Boin & 't Hart, 2003, p. 545).

Crisis Leadership: The leadership that is the focus of this study is that which takes place within the context of a crisis. The group under exploration, WOS, was not formally charged with leadership; they rose to leadership within a vacuum of effective leaders. According to Parry (1998), leadership is "the ability to influence others" (p. 86). It is coupled with the requirement to take action and make change (Parry, 1998).

Leadership Formative Experience: This study will use the definition of leadership formative experience (LFE) taken from Janson (2008) that describes it as an experience that makes "a high impact on leaders resulting in learning relevant to their leadership" (Janson, 2008, p. 73). Formative experiences are those that change, help develop, or transform an individual. Experiences such as coping, struggle, and interactions with role models are considered leadership formative experiences (Janson, 2008).

Identity Development: As described by Kempster (2006) and applied in this study, this concept will signal the varying levels that participants have bridged to view themselves as leaders. It is "a fluid, dynamic process that interconnects with an individual's past (lived experience) with

both their present identity and future identity" (Kempster, 2006, p.6). In this study, this term will apply to their identification of themselves as leaders.

Situated Learning: This form of learning involves interactions with the individual's environment and context, specifically "engagement in the lived in world" (Kempster, 2006, p.6). This concept will offer an opportunity to explore aspects of crisis leadership learning within the framework of lived experiences.

Observational Learning: This form of learning is not an imitation of others but does result from observations of others, such as role models (Kempster, 2006). It is "an interconnected process of situated learning and identity development" (Kempster, 2006, p. 7).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions that guided the researcher throughout the study. First, the time period under consideration encompasses the period within one year after Hurricane Katrina. The immediate event, the hurricane itself, precipitated the subsequent series of crises that began with the breaking of the levees and was exacerbated by a lack of response, attention, and funding from multiple levels of government. This resulted in a vacuum of leadership from those traditional sources (Brinkley, 2006: Horne, 2008; Mann, 2006; H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006). This study assumes that the vacuum of leadership and the ongoing crises were particularly vital in the first year after the storm and lead to the emergence of citizen leaders such as the WOS.

Second, this study assumes that WOS filled a part of the leadership vacuum following Hurricane Katrina by serving in a role that would have traditionally been filled by political or

officially elected or appointed individuals. This role includes working directly with policy makers and members of Congress to gain attention and funding for post Katrina New Orleans; serving as a liaison and communicating with media, the Executive Branch, and Congress regarding the ongoing crisis in New Orleans; strategically organizing and implementing on site assessment opportunities for policy makers and members of Congress; and by collaborating and cooperating with other organizations and agencies in a non-partisan manner that supported the goal of moving New Orleans from crisis to recovery.

Third, this study assumes that there are unique experiences and perspectives within the Women of the Storm that supported their assumption of this leadership position during a time of crisis. These experiences and perspectives may have been garnered from education, family, role models, or learning experiences or may have been driven by the dire circumstances surrounding Hurricane Katrina. Although the theoretical framework and literature review provided some potential insight and perspective for the study, the research did not assume any patterns, common themes, or trends.

Fourth, this study assumes and acknowledges that WOS was not the only citizen's organization to rise to leadership during the crisis and that they are one important cog in a wheel of citizen leadership that arose in the wake of the hurricane. The exploration of this group provides the potential for a greater understanding of leadership during times of crisis by examining the experiences of citizen based organizations, specifically, WOS. Katrina provides many unique threads to weave into the web of crisis leadership research. Studying the Women of the Storm as one of these threads has the potential to enrich the fabric and extend the inclusiveness of the fabric of this literature.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for examining the Women of the Storm and their experiences and perspectives on leadership is based on recent literature and encompasses two primary areas of interest: crises and leadership during times of crisis and experiences related to leadership development.

Crisis leadership.

The aftermath of September 11 2001, coupled with other regional, national, and global crisis such as Hurricane Katrina and the Asian Tsunami of 2004, have encouraged the development of research into leadership during times of crisis. Theoretical development in crisis leadership literature is highly limited (Wooten & James, 2008). According to Wooten and James (2008), the literature is focused primarily in the communications domain and often serves simply to provide a framework for action, focused more on the situation than the development of competencies in the individual crisis leader. In order to begin to address this gap in the literature, Wooten and James (2008) used a grounded theory approach to explore the potential for the emergence of a theory of crisis leadership competencies. A purposive sample of twenty unique crises was derived from the Institute for Crisis Management database for the years 2000-2006. In addition, the data was triangulated with archival documents such as reports, newspapers, and journals to create a cross case matrix which was used in an ethnographic content analysis (Wooten & James, 2008). The results of the study identified several important competencies of crisis leaders including sense making, perspective taking, creativity, communicating, risk taking, learning and reflection (Wooten & James, 2008). This study provides a baseline of data for further exploring the concept of crisis leadership.

Experiences related to leadership development.

Echoing the sentiments of Wooten and James (2008) regarding a dearth of theoretical development related to crisis leadership competencies, Janson (2008) decried the lack of empirical literature on the formative experiences which are the "antecedents of leadership at play in leadership development" (p. 73). According to Janson (2008), leadership formative experiences (LFEs) are fundamental to developing leaders. LFEs are experiences which make a "high impact on leaders" and help to develop their "self concept" as a leader (Janson, 2008, p.73). In a study that included senior leaders who were participating in a leadership development program, Janson (2008) reflected on the long history of the concept of experience being a major influence in the lives of humans as emanating from the work and theories of Skinner. The study itself included three data collection phases from different participants in the program. A grounded theory approach was used to allow thematic development and was coupled with quantitative data. Janson (2008) utilized a "social constructionist perspective" to organize data into common themes (p.78). These themes were identified within transcripts from the group discussions of participants in the program. The results included 198 LFE's that were analyzed and reported. Most of these experiences had taken place in early adulthood and included learning through natural process, coping, self improvement, association with a cause, parental relationships, and role models (Janson, 2008). The results support the importance of formative experiences and leadership learning in early adulthood but Janson (2008) states that earlier experiences may not be recalled. Also discussed is the concept of critical mass of experiences that coalesce with what Avolio (2005) describes as trigger moments. Critical mass may provide for a delayed trigger when learning meets awareness of learning (Janson, 2008). This study lays

the groundwork for a deeper understanding of how these experiences can be used as actual learning tools.

The concepts of critical mass and awareness as well as the role of coping, struggle, and formative experiences in general are reflective of work done by Bennis and Thomas (2002). Bennis and Thomas (2002) came to describe these formative experiences as "crucibles" (p. 40). Crucibles are a "transformative experience through which an individual comes to a new or altered sense of identity" (p. 40). Kempster (2006) used a grounded theory approach in his study which focused on developing a theory to determine how leadership is learned through experiences. Six directors of multinational corporations were interviewed and data was triangulated among four stages of the research process—from the pre-interview stage in which participants provided a timeline of experiences to the final stage where participants reflected on the process. Kempster (2006) used Hycner's (1985) methodology for analyzing phenomenological data and developed units of meaning, clusters of meaning, and themes. The results attributed learning to role models, influences of individuals, and observations of leadership. Learning leadership takes place through observations of leaders and through developing an identity as a leader through interactions (Kempster, 2006). As stated earlier, the concepts discussed by Kempster (2006), Janson (2008), Avolio (2005), and Bennis and Thomas (2002), will be used as a starting point for the discussion of the leadership experiences of the members of the Women of the Storm.

Chapter Summary

The preceding chapter outlined the background, research questions, definitions, assumptions, and limitations of this study. In addition, an overview of the theoretical framework

guiding this study was discussed. With this framework in hand, the researcher has been able to integrate fundamental theories and ideas into this study. They have assisted in framing the questions, identifying gaps and voids, and have provided the structure to elucidate and inform the overall study. In Chapter 2, a more detailed review of the literature that formed the basis of this study will be presented.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of literature related to this study. The literature review encompasses five primary areas. First among these is the consideration of the meaning of the term crisis in modern research literature. Second, crisis leadership is discussed both as a singular area of study as well as within the framework of differentiating it from crisis management. Crisis leadership is often observed within the context of a particular crisis. As this study is focusing on the crises brought on by Hurricane Katrina, an exploration of the failure of crisis leadership within the context of Katrina will provide a meaningful framework for the emergence of citizen leadership in general, as well as the specific case of the Women of the Storm (WOS). A discussion of WOS will provide a greater depth of understanding of their leadership role during the Katrina crisis. These contextual and descriptive discussions will provide the needed background to explore the ideas of leadership during times of crisis and serve as starting points for the examination of the experiences related to leadership development.
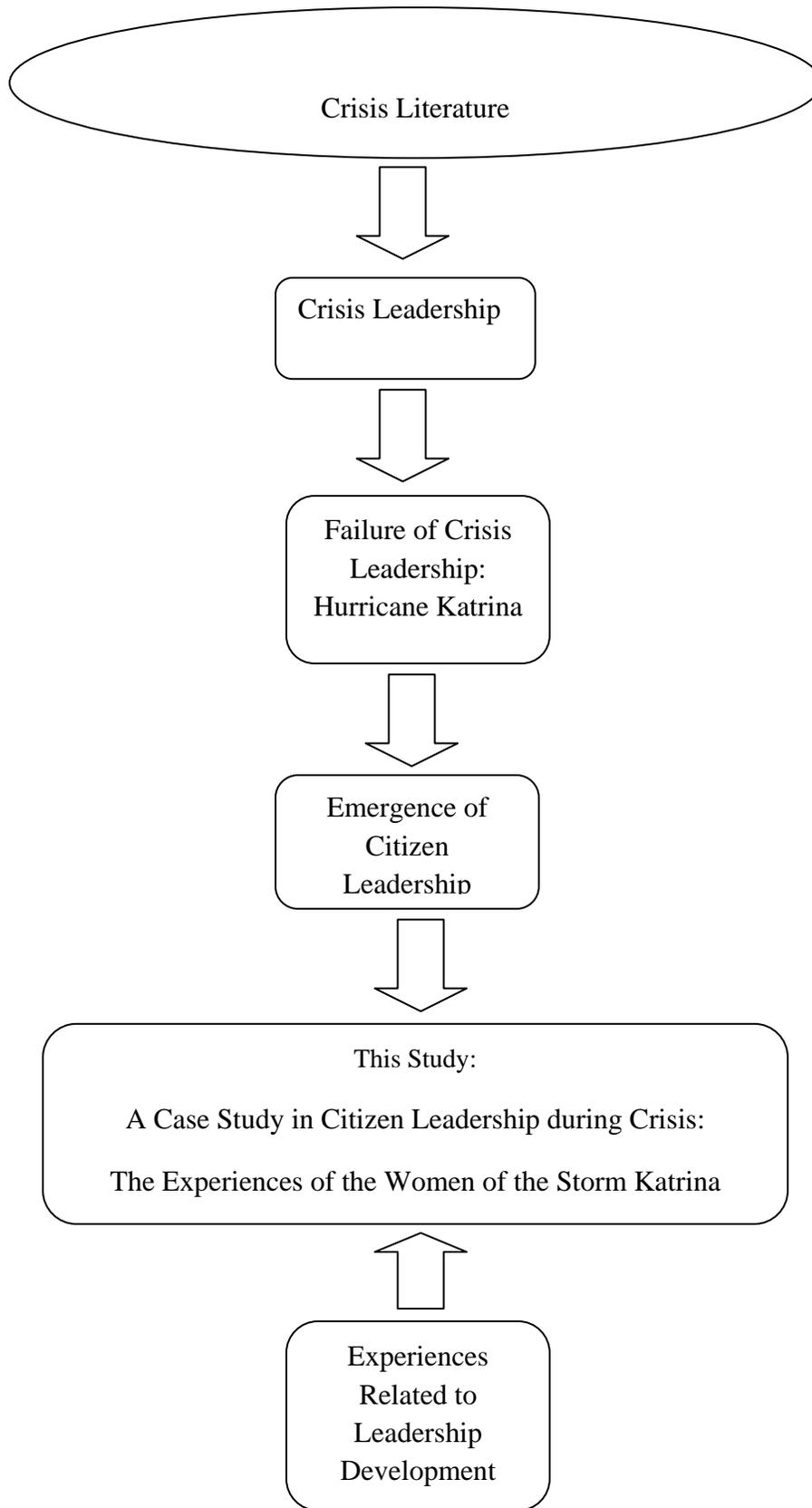
Figure 2.1 Diagram of relationship of components of literature review

Definition of Crisis

Prior to discussing the crises spawned by Hurricane Katrina it is important to provide a brief discussion of the term crisis and what it entails in a modern post Katrina context. The word crisis has come to mean many things to many people. Its origins come to us from the Greek '*krisis*' meaning decision or to decide (Lord, 1998). A crisis is a turning point in the life of an individual, organization, community, or society and one in which repercussions to those involved can be dire (Chabries, 2004). However, the term crisis has been defined and redefined throughout crisis literature. There are a myriad of definitions that expand, contract, and realign. This has, at times, caused conflict and disagreement among researchers in the field (Boin, 2004; Boin & 't Hart, 2003; McConnell & Drennan, 2006; Perry & Quarantelli, 2005). In some cases, researchers have created a concrete list of exact elements that define a crisis, while others have extolled the idea that a crisis is determined by an individual's perception of events and personal level of impact (McConnell & Drennan, 2006). For the purposes of this study, it is important to briefly explore the meaning of the term crisis in recent literature.

Scholars have determined that the type of crisis often has a unique indicator, warning sign, or signal. These indicators can serve to facilitate early intervention or help in the preparation for actions that address and potentially ameliorate the situation (Bazerman & Watkins, 2004). In the case of Hurricane Katrina, there were reports, documents, and articles, many from scientists and researchers, describing the potential for destruction well in advance of the event (H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006; Irons, 2005). There was also reliable meteorological evidence made available to decision makers more than five days prior to the event (H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006).

Generally, most crises fall into two distinct categories. First, and most obvious, are the sudden crises. As can be gleaned from their name, these are the most unexpected types of events that can come in the form of violence, terrorism, natural disasters, violent crime, or even technology meltdown. The second form is the smoldering crisis (Pearson & Clair, 1998; James & Wooten, 2005). A smoldering crisis is one which is preceded by some possible warning signs and comes in the form of workplace issues such as safety, sexual abuse or harassment, or fiscal mismanagement (Pearson & Clair, 1998; James & Wooten, 2005). Smoldering crises, in which signals and signs are disregarded and evolve into a full crisis, are often seen as the fault of management and leadership (Grant & Mack, 2004; James & Wooten, 2005). Hurricane Katrina brought components of the smoldering and sudden crisis together, making it one of the most complex events to occur in US history (Alpert, 2006; Comfort, 2006; Waugh, 2006). As stated earlier, there was substantial evidence predicting the dire circumstances that would befall New Orleans should such a hurricane make landfall, yet the nature of events such as hurricanes bring with them aspects of sudden crises as well.

The nature of crises in the modern world is that they are dynamic, interconnected events, in which the rapid communication of information and unraveling of events can have unforeseen impacts that may increase the length, scope, and effect of the event (Boin & 't Hart, 2003; Perrow, 1999). When crises do occur, it is often a surprise to the public. As in the case of Hurricane Katrina, the disastrous event had not only been predicted but also expected, yet there was a failure to prepare and plan (Brinkley, 2006; H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006; Irons, 2005). Despite increased awareness, a growing sense of vulnerability, and near constant attention to daily occurrences, the public is still surprised by these events and by the fact that our leaders cannot control them (Boin & 't Hart 2003). It is how leaders perform during crises that can

make the difference between an escalation and prolonging of the crisis and an effective and meaningful response that leads to recovery. Therefore, is important to this study to explore the void in leadership that occurred throughout the Katrina crisis in order to understand how organizations like WOS emerged and played key leadership roles in bringing New Orleans from crisis to recovery.

The purpose of exploring the concept of crisis leadership within the framework of this study is that it provides us with a benchmark of what qualities and actions should have been demonstrated by leaders during and after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. It is also important to gain an understanding of recent threads in the literature on crisis leadership. It is important to note that the researcher in using the term 'organization' within this discussion does so in an effort to be concise. This term, in actuality, can mean any group, community, government, or other entity.

There are many commonalities shared by those who define crises and those who define crisis leadership. As in the case of crises, there are multiple definitions, approaches, and standards for explaining the phenomenon of crisis. Similarly, there are many definitions, approaches, and theories of leadership (Sementelli, 2007). By coupling these two phenomena and endeavoring to explain or associate meaning within this new context, an evolving matrix of associations and assumptions is created. Within Sementelli's (2007) framework, crisis leadership falls within the category of administrative theories that also include management, ethics, and responsibility. This distinction between crisis management and crisis leadership is one that has evolved over the last several years.

Crisis Management vs. Crisis Leadership

The literature in crisis research has evolved from a focus on management to a move toward the concept of leadership. Crisis management literature itself has a long history. One of the precursors to current crises literature resulted from the Tylenol poisoning cases of 1982 (Mitroff, 2002; Simola, 2005). This event could have signaled the end of the Johnson and Johnson company. Although it brought wide-spread fear to users of the product, the incidents resulted not in the dissolution of the company, but in the evolution of new approaches to managing crises (Mitroff, 2002; Simola, 2005).

Crises like that of the Tylenol poisonings highlighted the potential long-term impact of a crisis on human and financial resources and fostered interest in a more exhaustive examination of both organizational and managerial/leadership roles during crises. Prior to this event, crises were frequently described as manageable, short-term events that were handled by middle level operators and managers (Boin, 2004). A crisis was an event that could be prepared and planned for and would be followed by a return to normalcy. After the Tylenol scare and events such as September 11, crisis researchers reexamined these earlier assumptions.

Current research literature examines the phenomena of crises as high impact, high consequence events (Mitroff, 2002; Moats, Chermack, & Dooley, 2008; Pearson & Clair, 1998; Wang, 2008). Crises are often described as impossible missions and beyond the capabilities of middle management (Boin & 't Hart, 2003; McConnell & Drennan, 2006). As a result, crisis management literature has evolved into crisis leadership literature with a focus on the role of the leader and paying significant attention to the unpredictability of crises and the subsequent inability of organizations and management to plan properly for these events (Irons, 2005;

McConnell & Drennan, 2006). It also highlights the more global, more exposed nature of crises, with increased expectations for positive results.

Crisis Leadership

Literature in leadership often focuses significant attention on the skills of a particular individual or leader. In addition, there is emphasis on how decisions are made, strategic thinking, mobilizing the organization, and serving with an attitude of self-sacrifice and humility (Bennis, 2003; Collins, 2001; Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005; Useem, Cook, & Sutton, 2005). Literature in crisis leadership runs along similar lines, often analyzing the leadership behaviors and perceptions that emerge during crises. There is no single model for success of leadership in a crisis. Some of the factors that indicate success include:

- speaking with candor
- acting with self sacrifice
- delegating decisions
- flexibility
- admitting from mistakes
- following through with promises or commitments

All of these are qualities which should be found in good leadership in general. The difference in a crisis situation is that each action or decision may have high consequences and frequently made under severe time constraints, and media scrutiny. In navigating times of crisis, leaders must be focused on solving the problem, must be aware of the political climate, and take care with what they say to the public and the media. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, statements

were made by leaders at all levels to the media and in meetings that had a dire impact on subsequent coordinated and collaborative responses to the crisis.

One research area that has seen some advancement is that of crisis leadership competencies. Wooten and James (2008) define leadership competencies as "the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform a task" (p. 354). Within a crisis context, leaders need additional competencies such as perception and sense making working within time constraints. Like much other crisis research, this tends to focus on organizational crises in business settings. However, it is meaningful to examine this research for two reasons. First, it outlines the actions and competencies that should have been demonstrated by leaders throughout the Katrina crisis and, in many cases, were not. Second, it represents an emerging interest in crisis leadership that begins to touch on implications for leadership development and learning.

James and Wooten (2005) endeavored to identify basic competencies for crisis leadership. They state,

> ...consequences to a firm's reputation from mishandling a corporate crisis can linger for decades. We want to emphasize that it is often the (mis)handling of crises, not the crisis itself, that can have the most consequences – positive and negative – for a firm. What differentiates those firms that thrive following a crisis from those that do not is the leadership displayed throughout the process. (p. 141)

In their overview, James and Wooten (2005) discuss the types of crises, sudden and smoldering, which were described previously, as well as begin to form some assumptions about core competencies of crisis leadership. These include:

- building a foundation of trust;

- creating a new mindset;

- identifying vulnerabilities;

- making wise and rapid decisions;

- taking courageous action; and

- learning from the crisis.

In order to study their assumptions related to crisis leadership competencies, James and Wooten (2005) examined what they have identified as the courageous action competency within a group setting. The courageous action competency is particularly unique to crisis situations. Within a crisis, it is common for leaders to demonstrate more conservative actions. According to James and Wooten (2005), crisis events which bring with them such a threat of risk for each decision that leaders tend to move away from risk taking. These actions become so conservative that the leaders act in a mode known as "threat rigidity" (p. 148). James and Wooten (2005) posit that a true crisis leader will be able to make risky yet wise decisions and avoid a rigid stance. In order to examine this idea more fully, James and Wooten (2005) studied a group which was comprised of 132 participants, who evaluated, via a survey, the response of a fictitious company to a class action lawsuit. The participants rated the effectiveness of various types of responses as either management or representative of leadership. According to James and Wooten (2005), the results demonstrate that when individuals demonstrate leadership skills rather than management skills, the overall perception of the organization is more positive.

In a second more recent study, Wooten and James (2008) focused on the identification of competencies that would enable an executive to lead their organization successfully through a crisis and compared those with crisis phases. In order to investigate this concept, Wooten and James (2008) used a purposive sample of twenty unique crises derived from the Institute for Crisis Management database for the years 2000-2006. The database is a prescreened database of news items and articles that have been written about crises that occur each year. A qualitative grounded theory approach was used, specifically ethnographic content analysis. This was used to identify the "communication and meaning of behavior, as well as to verify theoretical relationships (Wooten & James, 2008, p. 361). In addition, the data were triangulated with archival documents such as reports, newspapers, and journals to create a cross case matrix that was used in the analysis. This matrix provided the researchers with the ability to recognize patterns and themes. Wooten and James (2008) specifically looked for "displays of knowledge, skills, or abilities by leaders managing the crisis" (p. 361). These were also compared and included in the matrix to reflect the phase of the crisis in which these competencies were displayed. The phases of a crisis include: signal detection, preparation and prevention, damage control and containment, recovery and reflection and learning (Wooten & James, 2008). The results of the study identified several important competencies of crisis leaders including sense making, perspective taking, creativity, communicating, risk taking, learning and reflection throughout each phase of the crisis (Wooten & James, 2008). Sense making, which will also be discussed within the context of leadership development experiences later in this chapter, is "turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). Leadership competencies have been an emerging concept in crisis literature but have yet to be widely

studied in depth. James and Wooten in both studies, advance their goals of gaining greater insight into leadership competencies while also furthering the potential for engaging human resource development in the enhancement of an organizations ability to address crises. While these studies do not address Hurricane Katrina in particular, the do begin to shine light on the skills needed by one who leads during crisis.

Comfort (2007), in a review of the crisis response during and after Hurricane Katrina, addresses the changing landscape for crisis leadership and management. Her research included an analysis of government reports, documents, newspaper articles, and communications to develop a detailed timeline of events and responses to those events. The purpose of this review was to identify when and how communication and action took place and to provide recommendations for action in other crises. Although the methodology and focus of this study are not directly pertinent to the study at hand, Comfort's work provides a solid foundation and analysis of what happened during the first eleven days of the Katrina crisis. Her review suggests that to address the complexity of the crises facing society today, leaders must address the situations as unique and perceive the risk as it evolves and not as plan would dictate. This ability is described as "the four Cs: cognition, coordination, communication, and control" (Comfort, 2007, p. 189).

In seeking a deeper understanding of crisis leadership, a qualitative case study by Lincoln (2005) explored the concepts within the framework of leadership and crisis leadership in the context of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. This study, which has helped frame the methodology of the study at hand, focused primarily on the experiences of individuals who were in leadership positions during 9/11. By using a purposeful sample and interviewing seven business leaders who experienced the attacks and acted in a leadership capacity before, during,

and after the crisis, Lincoln (2005) was able to elicit rich descriptions of their experiences and

perceptions of leading during a crisis. Common themes among these descriptions support many

of the ideas espoused in the research literature described in the previous paragraphs.

Communication, delegation, flexibility, vision, and focusing on resilience all appear within the

interview descriptions. These concepts, in unison with additional studies cited herein, were used

to create a baseline set of nodes or themes for analyzing data for the current study. Equally

important and particularly relevant to this study were the descriptions of previous experiences

and learning experiences that helped build leadership competencies. Lincoln (2005) summarizes

these experiences by stating that "some of these leadership opportunities occurred when the

participants were quite young and the lessons they learned were transferred to the work

environment" (p.87).

A study by Chabries (2004) examined leadership during the Salt Lake City Olympics

related to the anthrax crisis. As with Lincoln (2005), the study is an important contribution to

the limited body of qualitative research on crisis leadership. In the case study, Chabries (2004)

interviewed eleven individuals who were public officials involved with the Olympic games

during the Anthrax crisis. Like Lincoln (2005), Chabries used a purposeful sample to identify

participants for the study. Interview transcripts, field notes, and extant data such as reports and

documents were collected and analyzed for common themes. The results provided insight into

this unique case and the leadership of those involved. Common themes included

communication, resiliency, and coupled and linked crises (Chabries, 2004). Within the study

there are reflections of experiences and coping but, like much literature in crisis leadership,

gaining an understanding of how these individuals learned to lead and the experiences that

contributed to that learning are not examined. In both Chabries (2004) and Lincoln (2005) the

leaders engaged in the studies, as well and the incidents themselves are accepted as having been successful. Unlike Katrina, in which information about the hurricane and the potential effects of an impact were widely and readily available, there were many failures in information systems and intelligence. Information may not have been neatly packaged, but leadership was present and responsive. The effective work of FEMA and the various responders in affected cities in the aftermath of September 11, helped those who wished to serve as leaders, like Bush and Giuliani, provide a focal point for moving forward (Brinkley, 2006). The city of New Orleans had no such leadership.

The Failure of Crisis Leadership: The Case of Hurricane Katrina

Since Hurricane Katrina made landfall in 2005, there have been numerous reports, books, and articles highlighting the lack of leadership throughout the crisis. Waugh and Streib (2006) in an analysis of the event, describe Katrina as having exposed the disarray of our emergency response leadership. According to Waugh and Streib (2006), it is not necessarily an issue of ineffective organizations. To illustrate this, they discuss the well coordinated, multijurisdictional, and collaborative approach to September 11, which was highlighted by a large cadre of volunteer and community groups playing support roles throughout the crisis and recovery (Waugh & Streib, 2006). In addition, Waugh and Streib (2006) discuss the decade-long approach of developing integrated and coordinated response avenues. This approach was precipitated by the delayed and untimely responses to Hurricanes Hugo and Andrew. Waugh and Streib (2006) assert that an integrated approach that involved multiple types of organizations would have been more effective than the traditional top down, government only approach in the responses to Hugo and Andrew. In fact, after these events, there were efforts to integrate

community, volunteer, and private businesses such as Home Depot into response planning (Waugh & Streib, 2006). The early failure to approach crises more creatively is the result, according to Waugh and Streib (2006) of a failure of imagination on the part of leaders and emergency responders. They were, in essence, unable or unwilling to imagine different outcomes and responses.

The H.R. Report No. 109-377 (2006) found this failure combined with a failure of initiative by those in leadership positions. Leaders potentially failed to imagine the extent to which a hurricane could devastate a city, and failed equally to act in response. The leadership at all levels failed to do what is required of leaders throughout a crisis—from the initial trigger event throughout all phases of the crisis. These failures included not only the lack of imagination and initiative, but they failed to be proactive, flexible, communicative, collaborative, and demonstrated a lack of partnership building (H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006; S. Rep. No. 109-322, 2006; Waugh & Streib, 2006). Missing also were a sense of urgency and the understanding of the magnitude of the devastation (S. Rep. No. 109-322, 2006).

In testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs investigating Katrina in 2006, Donald Kettl, Director of the Fels Institute of Government at the University of Pennsylvania, stated, "Leadership matters most. Structure matters. But leadership counts far more" (S. Rep. No. 109-322, 2006, p.3). While Kettl's testimony was directed more toward the role of FEMA, his point is well taken in a broader context. He also stated that "structure can help support leadership…but it cannot substitute for leadership" (S. Rep. No. 109-322, 2006, p.3).

Another telling indicator of the leadership vacuum at the time was the plethora of cartoons highlighting the failures of leadership. From Bush to FEMA, cartoons followed the daily incongruities of leadership in the aftermath of Katrina (Kelley-Romano & Westgate, 2007). Of particular relevance is one such cartoon by cartoonish Scott Stantis. Stantis who was a cartoonist for the Alabama paper, the *Birmingham News*, and is now with the *Chicago Tribune*, chronicled the array of failures and human foibles that characterized much of the leadership and response to Katrina. One cartoon from the *Birmingham News* is particularly meaningful in understanding the perception and impact of the vacuum of leadership following Katrina. The cartoon shows a man standing chest deep in water holding a sign that reads "*Leadership Please*" (Kelley-Romano & Westgate, 2007).
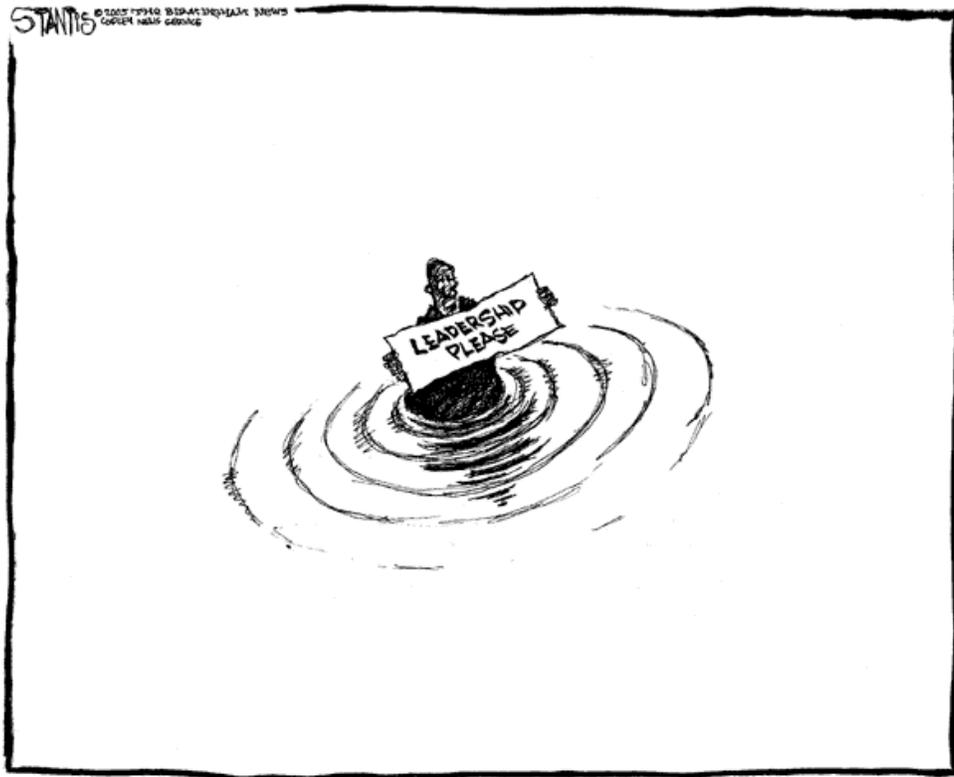
Figure 2.2. Leadership Please

_____

Cartoon from the *Birmingham News* by S. Stantis, September 5, 2005, Used by permission.

In response, some of those in leadership positions have stated that the results of the

hurricane and the subsequent breach of the levees, not to mention the human and financial cost,

could not have been predicted (Irons, 2005). Yet there is substantial documentation and

evidence that stated clearly and decisively that a major hurricane would result in breached or

overtopped levees and substantial loss of human life (Brinkley, 2006; Horne, 2008; H.R. Rep.

No. 109-377, 2006; Irons, 2005). Documentation of this exists in the form of the Hurricane Pam

exercise had taken place only months before Katrina hit New Orleans. The Hurricane Pam effort

involved more than 270 individuals from agencies in various levels of government, and the

devastation simulated by the Pam scenario eerily dovetailed with that of Katrina (Brinkley, 2006;

Horne, 2008). This virtual Hurricane was a category three with aspects of a category four and

was centered on the Gulf Coast and New Orleans. The scenario included an estimated death toll

of 60,000 casualties, as well as extensive damage to infrastructure including communications,

water, electricity, and sewer (H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006). According to the U.S. House

Select Committee (2006), the simulation estimated that 97% of communications would be out of

order and that the injured and sick would number in the hundreds of thousands. Yet, once the

exercise was completed, those attending returned to business as usual (Brinkley, 2006). In

addition to the Hurricane Pam exercise, state, local and federal government agencies did have, in

one form or another, evacuation and response plans for hurricanes (Brinkley, 2006).

There was also an existing line of communication and chain of command for how such

disasters should be handled from local to state and federal. According to Brinkley (2006), even

prior to Katrina making landfall, local and state governments had already alerted the federal

government that the situation was beyond their capability to address. This was the first step in a

long, drawn out "blame game" (Brinkley, 2006, p. 56). This circular reasoning and blame-

placing not only impeded the immediate response but colored the subsequent confusion and lack

of response to the ongoing crises that were the legacy of Katrina.

It is important refrain from understating the enormity of the Katrina crisis and the

complexity of the situation. Katrina was a catastrophe that has heretofore been unseen in the

United States. An area the size of Great Britain, more than 90,000 square miles, was devastated

by the Hurricane and flood waters—flood waters that were in large part a cesspool of hazardous

materials, chemicals, and human waste (Brinkley, 2006). There were no functioning

communications, electrical services, or water, nor were there enough busses, planes, and other

transportation, or health services for those remaining in the city. So it is possible to imagine and

even expect that faced with such devastation, human need, and a complete lack of resources the

challenges to any leader or group of leaders were enormous. The desperate nature of the

immediate situation was heard in the voice of Mayor Ray Nagin in an interview on Thursday

September 1, 2005. Garland Robinette, a WWL radio host asked Nagin: "What do you need

right now to get control of this situation?" To which Nagin replied:

> I need reinforcements, I need troops, man. I need 500 buses, man. We ain't
>
> talking about -- you know, one of the briefings we had, they were talking
>
> about getting public school bus drivers to come down here and bus people out
>
> here. I'm like, "You got to be kidding me. This is a national disaster. Get
>
> every doggone Greyhound bus line in the country and get their asses moving

to New Orleans." That's -- they're thinking small, man. And this is a major,

major, major deal. And I can't emphasize it enough, man. This is crazy.

It is not within the scope of this study to deeply examine the failure of individual existing leaders at the time. However, it is important to acknowledge that even in the most desperate hours, when the situation was clearly beyond the scope of local and state resources, when lives were at stake, leadership was glaringly absent even in those early hours and days (H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006). In the days that followed the lack of leadership from traditional sources caused subsequent crises, like dominos falling, one after another. Katrina was not a single crisis. It was not a hurricane such as Hugo or Andrew with the traditional hurricane damage. It is not to say that these events were not catastrophic but they were not of the scope of Katrina. Katrina and the subsequent breaching of the levees began a series of crises that lasted for months, if not years. For example, it is estimated that initially 1.2 million people evacuated from the region and a subsequent 120,000 people whose homes were flooded or destroyed became the second wave of evacuation (Nigg, Barnshaw, & Torres, 2006). Over 1300 deaths were attributed to the initial crisis—the hurricane and levee breach—while many more deaths of evacuees and eventually displaced persons took place over the ensuing months. Another little seen aspect of the disaster is the dramatic rise in mental illness. This was brought on by the traumatic stress of the experience, the lack of social networks (due to displacement, death, and a lack of existing housing), and a lack of response from government agencies (Bourque, Siegel, Kano, & Wood, 2006). Even electrical service was still not fully restored without outages by the first anniversary of the storm (Mann, 2006). In addition, the streets of the city were littered with more than 300,000 refrigerators and 250,000 destroyed vehicles (Mann, 2006).

New Orleans is home to the nation's two largest industrial ports. It is responsible for a third of our seafood acquisition and distribution. Further, it is the location of 4,000 oil and gas platforms, 33,000 miles of oil pipelines, as well as one quarter of our natural gas and oil supply. These facts did not dissuade more than 43% of Americans polled from suggesting that areas of the city need not be rebuilt (Mann, 2006; Brinkley, 2006). The displacement of people and subsequent delays on the part of traditional leadership to respond and rebuild the hardest hit areas, led to delays in the return of restaurants, hotels, workers, and others, many of whom lived in the most devastated and last to be addressed areas. Even the venerable Emeril Lagasse, whose foundation provided substantial funds and support to help New Orleanians throughout the crisis and recovery, stated that restaurants could not open since there was no one to staff them.

The void in leadership is the primary driver behind the rise in leadership from among average citizens to begin to solve the crises that confronted New Orleans and kept it from recovery. Evidence that the crises spawned by Katrina continued long past the actual first few days surrounding the event can be seen in an editorial in the *New York Times* December 11, 2005, served as a call to action for the nation. The *Times* ("Death of an American City", 2005) editors wrote:

> We are about to lose New Orleans. Whether it is a conscious plan to let the
>
> city rot until no one is willing to move back or honest paralysis over difficult
>
> questions, the moment is upon us when a major American city will die,
>
> leaving nothing but a few shells for tourists to visit like a museum. We said
>
> this wouldn't happen. President Bush said it wouldn't happen. He stood in
>
> Jackson Square and said, "There is no way to imagine America without New
>
> Orleans." But it has been over three months since Hurricane Katrina struck

and the city is in complete shambles… There is no effective leadership that
we can identify. How many people could even name the president's liaison
for the reconstruction effort, Donald Powell? Lawmakers need to understand
that for New Orleans the words "pending in Congress" are a death warrant
requiring no signature.

Even one year later, much of New Orleans had yet to be rebuilt and resources, food,
shelter, and infrastructure were still unavailable and inoperable (Chamlee-Wright, 2006).
Therefore it is meaningful to explore those who have helped lead New Orleans from crisis to
recovery to potentially inform and enhance experiences in the future.

Emergence of Citizen Leadership

One of the unique aspects of the Katrina crisis was the response from the citizens of New
Orleans. Although this study focused on one group of citizen leaders, it is important to briefly
discuss some of the studies that have been conducted on the emergence of citizen leaders in the
aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

In the absence of leadership many of the members of the WOS, had already stepped up to
take a leadership role in other major efforts related to the crisis. One WOS organized and led the
Katrina Krewe which was a massive volunteer effort that was responsible for cleaning up
250,000 tons of trash and debris in the city. WOS also lead an efforts to address changes in the
levee boards, school reform, and crime known as Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans. Other
members of WOS led desperate efforts to rescue vital historic buildings, restaurants, and
businesses, and even bring food into the city. Members of WOS spearheaded initiatives as

diverse as running a foundation that brought aid and support to chefs, restaurants, and food services workers devastated by the crisis to directing an effort to address the mental health crisis that confronted the city after Katrina, to rebuilding historic and diverse neighborhoods (David, 2008; Mann, 2006; Pyles & Lewis, 2007; Tyler, 2007).

Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans, the Katrina Krewe, the Broadmoor Neighborhood Improvement District, Treme, the Emeril Lagasse Foundation, and many others had stepped up to address issues at the local level. As the director of the Broadmoor Improvement Association stated, "neighborhoods will have to fend for themselves…We are on our own" (Tyler, 2009, p. 330). The dedication, determination, and leadership were clearly demonstrated across a diverse group of citizens in the city—many of whom also came together to become the Women of the Storm.

Women of the Storm

Uncertain times and near omnipresent crises stress even the most robust society to the breaking point. Traditionally, it has been our community organizations that withstand the worst during times of crises. These organizations, from community food banks and shelters to rape crisis resource centers, are on bleeding edge of every crisis event. They serve as our societal "safety net" and, as such, are expected to address a wide range of societal woes and crises, often with limited resources (Perkins, Bess, Cooper, Jones, Armstead, & Speer, 2007). Rarely, however, are they required to step so squarely in the midst of crisis leadership outside these bounds. The failure of leadership throughout the crises brought on by Hurricane Katrina took place at the highest levels of government and involved federal, state, and local government

agencies and created the ensuing chaos and uncertainty (Bullard & Wright, 2009; "Death of an American City", 2005; H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006).

Despite apparent ongoing crises in New Orleans in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, those in leadership positions continued to deny, or blame others for the lack of responsiveness and to ignore the desperate situation that confronted many in and around the city. Even four months after the hurricane, which had left tons of garbage, toxic waste, disabled infrastructure, damaged ports, and thousands of devastated homes, the bodies of the all dead had yet to be found. The call for action and help to mitigate these crises spelled out in the *New York Times* editorial "Death of an American City" had largely gone unheeded by those in power. Dennis Hastert, then Speaker of the House, who stated shortly after the storm, "it looks like a lot of that place could be bulldozed" represented what many in Congress had come to feel—that funding the recovery and rebuilding New Orleans was not a priority nor a necessity (Tyler, 2007). This lack of interest and inaction were unacceptable to a small group of women who came together one day in January 2006 to discuss turning the tide of Congress and, in many ways, answering the call to save this vitally important city. These women would come to be known as the Women of the Storm (WOS).

Tyler (2007), in an overview of women's organizations post Katrina, describes the early days of WOS as a convening of women who were driven by the absolute dysfunction of local officials and a lack of interest on the part of federal officials in the ongoing crisis in New Orleans. The goal, according to Tyler (2007), was to reach out and connect with every member of Congress and request that they visit New Orleans in person at no expense to the taxpayers. The concept behind these visits was that clear communication about the ongoing crisis and devastation in New Orleans, coupled with onsite visits to experience personally the devastation,

and would move the mountain that is Congress. The desired result was for Congress to provide

funds for the region so that recovery could begin. For those who were willing to accept the

invitation, WOS had developed a well thought out strategy. The site assessments would include

a narrated and personal tour of the devastation and direct, frank presentations about the situation.

Their goals were to focus on obtaining funding and support for beginning the recovery,

rebuilding and improving levees, wetlands restoration, and financial support for those left

homeless after Katrina (Tyler, 2007).

David (2008) undertook an ethnographic study that was primarily a feminist gender

centric analysis of the WOS. The study provided an exploration of the convergence of cultural

components of the city and the group including the importance of the idea of southern ladies, as

well as the symbolism used by WOS. The interviews revealed that the group had strategically

utilized symbols to make an impact. These strategies included the use of blue umbrellas to

represent the blue tarps on the homes devastated by Katrina and their approach as southern ladies

offering invitations to Congress. These interviews took place one year after Hurricane Katrina

and highlight the gender and symbolic aspects of the group.

In a study of three organizations that emerged after Katrina, Pyles and Lewis (2007)

examine advocacy and organizing. The overview, which focused on the role of women in the

aftermath of Katrina, included interviews with members from three different organizations who

were leading efforts in New Orleans. These included a domestic violence/crisis response group,

a housing development group, and members of the Women of the Storm. This article, which

provided background and information on the organizations from a social work perspective, does

highlight the need for increased understanding of the role of citizen leaders in crisis situations

(Pyles & Lewis, 2007).

Thanksgiving and Christmas of 2005 found New Orleans and the Gulf Coast still immersed in chaos and crisis. All services transportation, water, gas, and electrical power, had been completely cut off for weeks and in some cases (Comfort, 2006). As described earlier, hundreds of thousands of residents of the area were displaced, leaving both a vacuum in terms of overall support services and a lack of available employees. Businesses were without workers, government agencies were understaffed, universities were operating at a bare minimum of their capacity, looting and crime were rampant, and thousands of homes, stores, and vital buildings, including hospitals were laid waste (H.R. Rep. No. 109-377, 2006). In this atmosphere of destruction, a woman named Anne Milling became increasingly desperate to "do something to save the city" (Personal communication, November 2, 2009).

As described in the previous section, there were amazing citizen lead efforts underway, despite the lack of leadership from official channels. What was sorely missing, and what disturbed the future Women of the Storm founder Milling, was the disinterest and disconnect on the part of policy makers and the federal government. In addition, local government was "too dysfunctional" to make this effort (Tyler, 2009, p. 334). New Orleans was still in crisis despite the valiant efforts of its remaining people, because it needed resources beyond the capabilities of state and local government agencies in order to move toward recovery (Tyler, 2009). Milling decided to seek out others who felt equally desperate and willing to do something to help change policy and bring relief to the city. In January of 2006, Milling initiated the first in a series of meetings with women from New Orleans who would soon become the original board members for the Women of the Storm. Their plan was to "storm" Capitol Hill by going to every member of Congress to bring to their attention the plight of New Orleans. These women had been selected due to their demonstrated leadership and commitment in the aftermath of Katrina and

their long term commitment to organizations in the city (Tyler, 2009; Personal communication, August 5, 2009). In their discussion that day, the women acknowledged that the region was in chaos, they felt their city was dying. Something had to be done. (Personal communication, November 4, 2009). It was this night, and this group, that became the core of WOS. Each woman in the group had overcome and was still struggling with her own crises, but there was recognition that New Orleans had to be saved and that the vacuum of formal leadership needed to be filled from other sources. By the end of January of 2006, the group had expanded to over 100 individuals. On January 30, 130 women boarded a plane and headed to Washington, DC, in an effort to save New Orleans (David, 2008).

Each woman, a leader in her own right, had a destination and a mission. The journey that began at a dinner table in early January 2006 and reached a dramatic climax on January 30 as the sea of women carrying blue umbrellas washed up the steps of the Capitol. They were there because their own leaders had failed to lead. The effort that led these women to this point required vision, collaboration, direct and meaningful communication, clarity of purpose, and commitment. These unique women had taken up leadership during the most devastating crisis in US history (Pyles & Lewis, 2007). According to Tyler (2009) less than six weeks after the visit of the Women of the Storm, a disinterested Congress had suddenly found that seeing New Orleans for themselves was important and the visits started in earnest.

Whether students of leadership by avocation or necessity, the Women of the Storm demonstrated a no-holds-barred approach to achieving their goals. Straddling the tightrope of bipartisanship like seasoned leaders, the Women navigated complex negotiations, arrangements, speaking events, tours of the devastation, and press conferences, all while maintaining the direct and frank communication that the situation demanded. As the number of Congressional visits

and the press coverage increased, each woman refused personal accolades and kept the focus on the issues at hand (Tyler, 2009). They were humble, direct, and honest in their efforts. Although the Women of the Storm did not act in the immediate aftermath of Katrina, their role in bringing both attention and funding to the city of New Orleans helped bring the needed attention to the city. . The funding and attention WOS brought to New Orleans during the crisis helped to bring New Orleans to the recovery phase. Therefore, it is significant to address leadership learning and development to the extent that it might help inform and enhance the study of the role of WOS in leading through the Katrina crisis.

Experiences Related to Leadership Development

There is little information on how leaders learn to lead during a time of crisis. Most crises are examined after the fact and are often colored both by the outcome and by the larger perceptions of the community. However, there has been increased interest, driven in part by the need for greater understanding, in how leadership is learned and how it develops. Understanding what promotes leadership development in general, may help to nourish our understanding of how crisis leadership can be learned as well.

It is estimated that in 2005 alone between $15 and $50 billion was expended on programs and efforts that teach leadership (Grint, 2007). There are currently hundreds of programs including short courses and coaching as well as programs at institutions of higher education, all of them specifically focused on crisis leadership alone. Yet there is still limited knowledge about those who are being taught (Grint, 2007; Hirst, Mann, Bain, Pirola-Merlo, & Richver, 2004). This is, in part, why recent leadership theory literature has called for a more integrated approach and integrative strategies for understanding and expressing theories of leadership (Avolio, 2007;

Bryman, 2004; Bryman, Stephens, & Campo, 1996; Parry, 1998). There are several schools of

thought on leadership learning.

The experiences that shape the life of a leader also shape how they lead. As described by

Bennis and Thomas (2002), it is these experiences that cause individuals to recreate a sense of

who they are and where they are going, and to develop a new vision of themselves. They force

one to ask how they relate to the rest of the world. These experiences are, as suggested by

Bennis and Thomas (2002), crucibles in which new selves are formed. In their three-year study,

Bennis and Thomas (2002) explored the experiences of forty leaders from different types of

organizations. These in depth interviews were conducted to discover how their experiences have

led to leadership development. Individual and environmental/societal factors were considered

within the exploration of how experiences were organized into meaning and resulted in the

development of leadership. Among these are "adaptive capacity, the ability to engage others by

creating shared meaning, voice, and integrity" (p. 89). It is also important to note that the study

found that the experiences are tempered by the evaluation of the individual. In many ways, it is

the interpretation of the meaning of these experiences that is most significant (Shamir & Eilam,

2005).

Building on these ideas, Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler (2005) examined the concept

of leadership development through an exploration of leader's life stories. The researchers

utilized two data collection approaches. First, the researchers conducted sixteen interviews with

organizational leaders who were all male. Second, the researchers examined the autobiographies

of known leaders, including Ghandi and David Ben-Gurion. Shamir et al. (2005) assert that

individuals do not explicitly present the meaning of their experiences. These must be articulated

or uncovered by the researcher through the examination of themes and principles. Through the

thematic examination of the data collected, Shamir et al. (2005) found that there were several primary impacts on leadership development including role models, struggle, and hardship.

Shamir and Eilam (2005) furthered this initial work and determined that there were four themes that consistently emerged in these life stories. These were stated as: "leadership development as a natural process, leadership development out of struggle and hardship, leadership development as finding a cause, and leadership development as a learning process" (p. 403). The natural process theme emerged through the stories as having "a quality of obviousness, sometimes an almost fatalistic quality" (p.404). The individuals simply felt they needed to lead. Development through struggle, much like the crucibles described by Bennis and Thomas (2002), were those experiences in which a line demarcated the before and after of their lives. They were transformed. Finding a cause brings together both the individual drive and the collective need. In these cases the individual identifies with a cause essentially finding themselves and their leadership abilities through this new found interest and commitment. The learning process, as described by Shamir and Eilam (2005), includes experiences that have resulted in learning such as previous failures or experiences that have come from either direct contact or modeling of a role model. Role models can be family members, mentors, or peers, or even historical figures whose lives has played out in public (Shamir et al., 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). The exploration of experiences in leadership development helped to frame the idea of how leadership is learned and the role of reflection in how it is developed.

Kempster (2006) conducted a grounded theory based study that included in depth interviews with six directors of businesses which built upon previous research with thirty-five individuals in a similar capacity. The focus of this effort was to develop a potential model for understanding how leadership is learned. Six directors of multinational corporations were

interviewed and data was triangulated among four stages of the research process—from the pre-interview stage in which participants provided a timeline of experiences to the final stage where participants reflected on the process. Kempster (2006) used Hycner's (1985) methodology for analyzing phenomenological data and developed units of meaning, clusters of meaning, and themes.
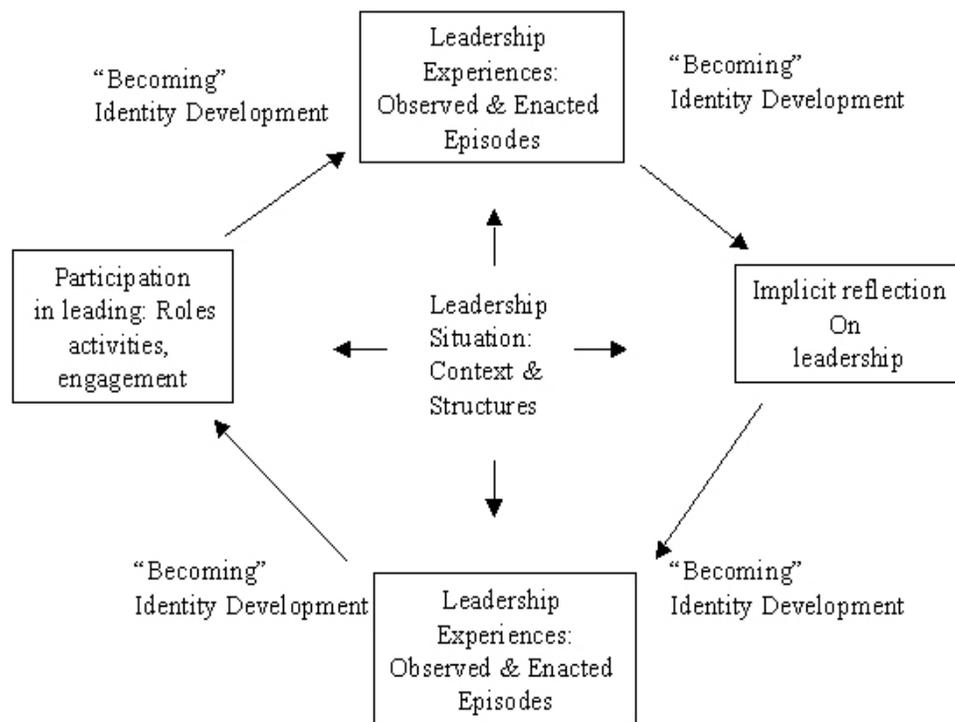
Figure 2.3 Diagram of leadership learning processes and experiences.

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From "Leadership learning through lived experience: A process of apprenticeship," by S. Kempster, 2006, *Journal of Management & Organization*, 12(1), p.16. Used by permission.

The result attributed learning as being most heavily reliant on role models, influences of individuals, and observations of leadership. Learning leadership takes place through observations of leaders and through developing an identity as a leader through interactions (Kempster, 2006).

The study explored types of learning experiences such as situated learning, observational learning, and participation. In situated learning, the individuals mind is an active agent, forming and framing information, environment, and context into knowledge and meaning (Fox, 1997; Kempster, 2006). Observational learning is the act of observe leadership. The observation serves as a learning experience. In the participation phase, individuals participate in leadership roles. Framing each of these is the concept of identity development. Individuals come to identify themselves as leaders as they go through these situations. However, the learning and identity development processes are fluid (Figure 2.2). Kempster's (2006) research found that the influence of individuals, models, and observations of leadership played an important role in the development of the identity of a leader. In addition, a key finding in Kempster's (2006) research was that the interview process and considerations of how they learned to lead had also resulted in a greater understanding on the part of the participants of how their lived experiences had contributed to their leadership abilities. According to Janson (2008), this research is meaningful in expanding our understanding of how leadership is learned. However, the missing link in this cycle is the aspect of reflection so prevalent in Shamir and Eilam's 2005 study.

Building on the work of Shamir et al. (2005), Shamir and Eilam (2005), Kempster (2006), Janson (2008) sought to capture information on what is called a Leadership Formative Experience (LFE). The study asserts that it is meaningful to determine which experiences are formative and relate to leadership development in part, so that more effective educational

experiences can be designed. This knowledge, according to Jason, has yet to be fully explored. Janson states "what has been largely missing in the literature has been an investigation of the inner reflective processes" (p. 75). In the review of literature, Janson (2008) cites the early work of Avolio and Gibbons (1988) known as the lifespan approach. According to Janson (2008), Avolio and Gibbons (1988) describe multiple influences within the lifespan that contribute to leadership development including family, predispositions, context and engagement in leadership development activities. Leadership development activities and experience in leadership roles often "strengthened the individuals' belief in the own leadership ability" (p. 74). This self concept of leader is reinforced with new experiences.

Janson (2008) used a grounded theory methodology to ascertain common themes of seventeen participants who were in leadership positions. LFEs are experiences that make a "high impact on leaders" and help to develop their "self concept" as a leader (Janson, 2008, p.73). A primary focus of this research was not only what types of learning interventions might be effective but when these interventions or experiences took place in the life of the leaders. The grounded theory approach was used to allow the emergence of themes and was coupled with quantitative data. Janson (2008) approached the study from a "social constructionist perspective" (p.78). Transcripts from group discussions among the participants were analyzed, and resulted in 198 LFE's that were identified.

Table 2.1. *Sense making types of leadership formative experiences.*

Story sense making	Principle and examples
'Natural Process'	Subjects must have naturally or without conscious effort taken leadership or had leadership thrust upon them, often for reasons they were unsure of (e.g. individual naturally takes charge as a child when self and older cousins get lost).
Coping and struggle	Must have included some element of adversity (e.g. dealing with a difficult boss)
Self-improvement	Included some element of striving to challenge oneself (and/or challenge but not adversity, except in slight degree, e.g. taking time out for mid-life academic study).
Alignment with a cause	Showed evidence of being driven by serving a cause (e.g. indigenous empowerment).
Relationship with (real or symbolic) parents	Included instances where the relationship with parents was prominent in the formative experience described (e.g. wanting to prove to his mother that he would amount to something unlike his father).
Rich models	For instances where one or more role models was prominent in the formative experience described (e.g. subject was developed by admired leaders).

Note: "Extracting Leadership Knowledge from Formative Experiences," by A. Janson, 2008, *Leadership*, *4*(1), p.82. Used by permission.

Table 2.1 outlines the sense making types of LFE's that were derived as part of the thematic coding. Janson (2008) reflects on the long history of the concept of experience being a major influence in the lives of humans as emanating from the work and theories of Skinner. This aspect of leadership gets to the core of how people learn to be leaders and, more importantly, why. The results support the importance of formative experiences and leadership learning in early adulthood, but Janson (2008) states that earlier experiences may not be recalled. Also discussed is the concept of critical mass of experiences that coalesce with what Avolio (2005) describes as trigger moments. Critical mass may provide for a delayed trigger event or tipping point when learning meets awareness of learning (Janson, 2008). This also may provide some explanation of why individuals react in times of crisis. Crisis situations could potentially provide the trigger that spawns sudden awareness of knowledge and capabilities, as well as providing an opportunity to act.

Day (2000) writes that "one of the primary reasons organizations invest in training and development for employees is to enhance and protect their human capital" (p. 583). While these can be important investments, and as stated earlier, significant financial investments, Day (2000) suggests that this more simplistic view of leadership learning ignores the more complex and potentially more meaningful aspect of social capital. Collective meanings, shared vision, interpersonal relationships, and value creation lend themselves to leadership that is more reflective of that required to lead in times of crisis.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the component within the literature relevant to the study of crisis leadership, learning experiences, in the overall context of Katrina and the WOS.

In an effort to understand more fully how crisis leadership is learned, literature on leadership formative experiences and learning have proved fruitful in that they describe how life experiences form a melting pot for developing leadership. Bennis and Thomas (2002) quote Aldous Huxley, "Experience is not what happens to a man. It is what a man does with what happens to him" (p. 94). This observation is in many ways what this study sought to explore— the experiences of the women of the Women of the Storm and how those experiences contributed to their leadership during the Katrina crisis. The literature review provided a framework for this current study and informed the development of research questions and instruments. In the next chapter, a discussion of the methodology used in this study will be provided.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and leadership actions of the group of individuals collectively known as the Women of the Storm (WOS) in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.

1. How did the events related to Hurricane Katrina influence and motivate the participants in relation to leadership?

2. What life experiences did the participants have that may have influenced their interest in taking a leadership role during the crisis?

3. How are the actions of Women of the Storm relevant in the context of leadership during times of crisis and what can be learned from their experiences?

This chapter discusses the methodology used in pursuance of this research study. The chapter will provide a brief overview of qualitative research. Following this discussion, the components of the research process will be addressed. These include researcher identity, research design, sampling strategy, participant description, instrumentation, data collection including reliability and validity, and ethical issues related to this endeavor (Figure 3.1).

Research Methodology

| Selection of Research Topic | Literature Review |

Research Design

| Pilot Project Insys 574 | Instrument Development | IRB Approval | Case Study | Purposeful Sample |

Data Collection

| On site /in field | Interview Participants/audio | Observations | Field Notes/Journal | Extant data |

Data Analysis

| Thematic Development (NVIVO nodes) from transcripts | Analysis of recorded observations/notes/extant data |

Reliability & Validity

| Triangulation | Reflexivity | Member checks | Peer review | Procedural records | Audit trail |

Description of Findings

| Experiences | Common themes | Relevance to crisis leadership | Recommendations for further research |

Figure 3.1 Overview of research methodology

Qualitative Research

Prior to describing in detail the strategies used in this study, it will be meaningful to briefly discuss the call for an increase in qualitative research in leadership. Over the last decade, an increasing number of researchers have called for the use of qualitative approaches to develop a more thorough understanding of leadership capability development. In particular Day (2000) discussed this need as one which should be met by more context driven qualitative studies. In general, the use of qualitative approaches in leadership research has been on the increase (Bryman, 2004). This increase has evolved simultaneously with a growing interest in leadership research that emerged in the 1990s (Bryman, 2004). This statement, made prior to the dramatic changes and interest in crisis leadership research that occurred after September 11, highlights the need to have a deeper understanding of the experiences of those who find themselves leading in times of crisis (Lincoln, 2005).

The increase in qualitative research into leadership in the last decades supports the idea that existing quantitative efforts have not adequately supported theoretical development in the area of leadership in general (Bryman, 2004). For example, Parry (1998) calls for the use of qualitative methods in leadership research due to the nature of leadership as a social process. Based on the increased interest in the use of qualitative methodologies in this area, the researcher designed and completed a qualitative study during the last half of 2008 and first few months of 2009. This effort was completed within the framework of two in depth qualitative research courses at Penn State University. The study, which was completed and reported on in April 2009, focused on the case of a crisis response community based organization and the experiences of individuals in leadership roles that supported and enhanced their ability to lead through crises. In addition, qualitative research has unique dimensions that will support the most illustrative and

meaningful results from this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe qualitative research as stressing the "socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (p. 8). The context, that of Hurricane Katrina, and the nature of the group being studied support the use of a qualitative methodology.

To explore these ideas and further the purpose of this study, a qualitative research approach—specifically case study—was selected. The case study was informed by input from multiple participants, i.e., members of the group WOS. Rich descriptions are supportive of gathering and discovery of phenomena (Yin, 2003). This statement proved true in this study in that the rich descriptions of experiences supported the discovery of multiple themes and well as a deeper understanding of the social context in which these experiences took place.

Researcher Identity

Prior to describing the methodology in more detail, it is important to briefly describe the researcher undertaking this study. In January of 2008, the researcher had an opportunity to present at a conference in New Orleans. Prior to the meeting, the researcher determined that it would be informative to learn more about the events subsequent to Hurricane Katrina, and how it impacted individuals and organizations in the New Orleans. In addition to exploring the devastated parts of the city, several meetings were scheduled with various groups including members of the Katrina recovery team and geographic information systems group in City Hall, members of the National Weather Service, and faculty at the University of New Orleans. These meetings took place throughout the week of the conference and were coupled with informal discussions with residents of New Orleans who were attending the conference as well. The

stories and information that were relayed during these discussions began to follow common themes. One prevalent theme centered on the lack of formal leadership during the crisis and the ongoing paralysis that those in leadership positions continued to demonstrate. After returning from New Orleans, the researcher began scanning the literature on leadership during times of crisis and found that the interest in this area was high, yet only limited research had been done utilizing a qualitative approach, the most recent of which followed the events of 9/11 (Lincoln, 2005). Observable behaviors had been identified but there were few explorations of how individuals learned to lead. Subsequent examination of the issue and of the crises related to Hurricane Katrina lead the researcher to come into contact with a reporter from the New Orleans newspaper, the *Times-Picayune*. The researcher's interest in crisis leadership and Katrina caused the reporter to connect the researcher with a board member of WOS. The description of the organization, the individuals involved, and their leadership roles satisfied many of the epistemological interests of the researcher and, subsequently, offered the opportunity to conduct an in-depth qualitative study.

Research Design

The purpose of this research study, with its focus on the experiences of a larger group within a specific context, called for a qualitative case study approach with multiple perspectives. As described earlier, qualitative research approaches are uniquely capable of providing rich descriptions by eliciting lived experiences and cultural perspectives (Patton, 2002). Stake (2005) describes the case study as an examination of the common and uncommon elements of a case, its nature, historical background and setting, and the participants or informants who provide some of the richness. Yin (2003) provides further guidance in stating that the case study provides for

"studies of events within their real-life context (p. 83). Yin (2003) also suggests the use of the case study approach if there are unique historical or social components of the study. Case studies are particularly effective when both individual and collective behavior and relationships within the context are revealed (Chabries, 2004). Finally, Yin (2003) describes the case study as appropriate when the researcher has expectations that there will be significant and meaningful revelations of phenomena. In exploring the experiences of WOS, it would be difficult to do so without examining the larger context that is post-Katrina New Orleans. This approach included interviewing participants in New Orleans and observations in the field. In addition, the researcher had the opportunity for an in-depth tour of the devastation at the time with an informed guide and participated in meetings and discussions with the members of the WOS. The researcher had dozens of conversations with New Orleanians who were present before, during, and after Katrina. Finally, the researcher had access to reports, documents, and press releases and observed documentary films, television programs, and video of both the devastation of Katrina and the actions of the Women of the Storm.

This study was conducted in the following steps: 1) Participant selection via a purposeful sample; 2) Development and refinement of instrumentation, specifically an open-ended interview guide informed by elements within the theoretical and empirical literature, as well as literature focused on the context of Hurricane Katrina; 3) Interviews of participants, as well as observations and examination of extant information, and artifacts; 4) Data analysis; 5) thematic development facilitated by NVIVO software analysis; 6) peer review of themes and results; 7) and thematic member checking.

Sampling Strategy

First and foremost, the researcher determined that purposeful sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, would be the most direct and meaningful approach to maximize discovery (Groenewald, 2004; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Wellman & Kruger, 1999). The purposeful sampling strategy provided rich information as well as that which was most directly relevant to this study (Patton, 2002). The group that was studied, WOS, was identified by the researcher through contact with an individual in New Orleans as described earlier. This individual provided the researcher with contact information and access to observation opportunities for WOS.

Participant Selection

The diversity among the organization's leadership was adequate to meet guidelines for inclusion established by the Institutional Research Board (IRB) office. However, it is important to note that the participants were all female. Diversity was found within both age and race. There were sixteen participants interviewed. Of the sixteen participants, thirteen were white and three were African American. The ages of the participants ranged from late 20s to 70. In addition, within this small yet diverse sample, shared patterns of experiences emerged and supported thematic development and saturation as described by Patton (2002).

All participants were residents of the New Orleans area prior to, during, and after Hurricane Katrina and performed in a leadership capacity. It was meaningful to the study that a third of the participants were not originally from New Orleans. These participants provided a unique perspective on how Hurricane Katrina made them feel more committed to being a New Orleanian. The participants were of different socioeconomic backgrounds as well. Several were

self described housewives, others were self employed, and running their own businesses or professional firms, and others were in leadership positions in nonprofit organizations. These were the descriptions of themselves prior to Katrina. Post Katrina, these self described housewives and professionals found themselves driven to take on greater leadership and responsibilities in the crisis.

One participant, who has been described as a petite, former debutante, had become a leader in addressing the mental health concerns of the people in post-Katrina New Orleans. A job that once entailed working mostly with the homeless or with drug addicts had come to encompass facing the tragedies and myriad personal crises that confronted those whom she had grown up with, lived near, and worked with. The average citizens of New Orleans had become traumatized by the events and a mental health crisis ensued beyond anyone's expectations. Another participant, who had prior to Katrina been a housewife and mother to small children, within a few short months of the levee breach had organized and led a group of thousands of volunteers from all over the country and the world in the cleaning up of 250 thousand tons of garbage from the city streets—filling a void left by both local and federal authorities who had yet to coordinate to do so. Another participant of this study, a real estate agent prior to Katrina, went on to organize and lead initiatives that changed state and local policies related to the management of the levee boards. These policies, which had been defeated and delayed for many years, were changed through the sheer force of will through the organization this participant founded. This organization has subsequently advanced work on education and criminal justice issues in the city with equal vigor and success.

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized for this study was an open-ended interview protocol with questions and probes to gather further information. The previous study undertaken by the researcher completed in 2009 provided an opportunity to develop and to refine an interview instrument based on a review of the literature in the areas of crises, leadership, formative leadership and learning experiences. This instrument was refined to also reflect literature that provides background for the contexts of Hurricane Katrina and WOS. The standardized open-ended interview allowed the research to develop fully within a conversational setting. This approach required the researcher to develop the interview instrument in full and to structure questions and probes to support ideas of interest within the study (Patton, 2002). However, it allowed for flexibility should the participants be openly cooperative and conversational, as was the case in this study. Patton (2002), in describing rigorous and skillful interviewing states, "we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe" (p. 340). Such interviewing also provides us with insight into their perspectives, which Patton (2002) describes as "meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p. 341).

The following areas within the theoretical framework were key in developing the interview instrument. It is important to note that in order to establish credibility and validity the interview questionnaire was developed and shared with a faculty member with qualitative research expertise. First, there has been extensive research into leadership during times of crisis. These include how decisions are made, strategic thinking, mobilizing the organization, vision, and serving with self-sacrifice, and humility (Bennis, 2003; Collins, 2001; Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005; Useem, Cook, & Sutton, 2005). In addition, behaviors have been the focus of ongoing research. These behaviors range from humility to selflessness and self-sacrifice as well

as the ability to make well-reasoned decisions under stress (Bennis, 2003; Collins, 2001; Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005; Useem, Cook, & Sutton, 2005).

In addition, a significant amount of research has resulted in the development of a set of success factors for leadership during times of crisis (James & Wooten, 2005; McGuire, 2006; Powley & Piderit, 2008; Robert & Lajtha, 2002; Smith & Elliot, 2007; Waugh & Streib, 2006; Wooten & James, 2008). The success factors include confidence, creativity, and flexibility (Robert & Lajtha, 2002). Finally, James and Wooten (2005) have outlined a set of guidelines and actions for leaders in crisis situations. These key approaches include optimism, removing negative thoughts, preparation, focus, emotional control, and plan. The instrument and interview style allowed for the ability to capture information on experiences that are unique to WOS. Finally, literature on formative leadership and learning experiences has laid out a series of categories and types of experiences that have contributed to leadership learning. These include coping or struggle, self-improvement, and alignment with a cause (Janson, 2008). Table 3.1 outlines the research questions and their relationship to the interview instrument. As described above, the interview instrument was developed utilizing research from multiple sources including literature related to experiences and learning as well as components of crisis leadership literature. Additionally, background information on education, birthplace, and occupation were included. This information provided an interesting element to the research by identifying those who were and were not from New Orleans. In the data analysis, the role of place became an important theme and was often generated by this series of questions.

Table 3.1 *Research questions and related interview questions.*

Research Question	Description of Question	Related Questions from Interview Instrument
1	How did the events related to Hurricane Katrina influence and motivate the participants to become leaders?	**Question 2b**: Role models **Question 3b**: Challenges of Katrina and related actions **Question 6**: Role of leaders during crisis **Question 8**: Leadership style **Question 11**: communication & coordination **Question 12**: Collaboration **Question 13**: Remaining in control, stress, support **Question 14**: Decision making **Question 18**: What would have made the crisis different **Question 19**: Preparation for crisis
2	What life experiences did the participants have that influenced their ability to assume a leadership role during the crisis?	**Question 1b**: School/educational information **Question 2a**: Career decision **Question 2b**: Role models **Question 4**: leadership training **Question 5**: Learning experiences **Question 16**: Reflections on leadership **Question 7**: Experiences related to leadership during crisis **Question 9**: Factors influencing crisis leadership actions **Question 17**: What have you learned
3	How are the actions of this group relevant in the context of the	**Question 3b**: Challenges of Katrina and related actions **Question 6**: Role of leaders during crisis

	leadership during times of crisis and what can be learned from their experiences?	**Question 9:** Involvement in WOS
		Question 15: Changes
		Question 20: Perspective and advice to others

Data Collection

The data collection phase encompassed a variety of components: phone conversations and interviews; in person interviews with fifteen participants and one phone interview; observations of the participants in their organizational setting and within the interview setting; observations of the context including the city and the setting of Katrina; and compilation and analysis of documents, reports, and articles. Prior to preparing for in-person interviews, the researcher worked directly with the organizational gatekeeper to gather information on participants and on background contextual information. Notes of these discussions were taken and used to help determine participant selection and identification of extant data.

In person interviews were held between October 29 and November 7 2009 in New Orleans. These ranged from one to three hours and varied by participant. The standardized open-ended interview instrument (see Appendix A) was used as a starting point to elicit responses and acquire information on the experiences of the participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions of the interviews included both the actual words spoken by the subject as well as any observations of non verbal communications that will help build on the meaning of the statements (Hycner, 1985). The resulting themes were member checked for comments and clarity during January 2010 and returned to the researcher with additional thoughts and clarifications on the ideas raised during the interview. Three of the

participants provided additional input via e-mail and three other participants asked to follow up with the researcher via telephone. In addition, the researcher participated in organizational board meetings and external gatherings of group members at local restaurants. While these meetings were not recorded and transcribed, the researcher maintained notations about the gatherings in a field journal. The field journal was also kept to record additional observations and commentary from nonparticipants in the study. Visits to local book stores, coffee shops, stores and taverns provided substantial observational material. The researcher discovered that most individuals still felt compelled—with little prodding—to discuss Katrina, the lack of leadership, and the role of citizens in the recovery. It was clear that the events and experiences were still quite real for the people of the city. Although extant information had been obtained in the form of reports, website material, and newspaper articles, the researcher also found that television, documentary film, and talk radio provided some interesting insights and observational material. This will be reported on further in Chapter 5.

A peer review process was utilized. Since the context was an important component of the study, the selected reviewers were both either current or past residents of New Orleans who had direct experience with Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Two peer reviewers, both of whom are in academic positions at universities, were engaged and asked to review and comment on the results of the data analysis. Themes and concepts were shared with the peer reviewers and their comments were reviewed and discussed for clarity.

Data Analysis

Due to the complexity of this study, multiple data analysis approaches was employed. During the data analysis phase, several types of data were utilized. These included descriptions

of lived experiences derived through the process of open ended interviews; observational data; and extant data and artifacts that include reports, documents, newsletters, and secondary data. However, it was vital that the researcher first be open to understanding and exploring the phenomenon through the process of bracketing and reduction prior to engaging in any analysis (Hycner, 1985).

As described earlier, the steps in the research process begin with descriptions that are exemplified in the data collection phase and proceed to data analysis through the reduction and interpretation steps (Lanigan, 1988). The primary goal of the reduction step is to continuously review the data to determine if themes and general meaning emerge (Hycner, 1988; Keen, 1975; Lanigan, 1988). One component of reduction is to replay the audio recordings of the interview in order to experience the interview as a whole and develop a richer understanding of the information and in such a way that the nature of the phenomenon is revealed (Hycner, 1985; Keen, 1975; Van Manen, 1997).The researcher listened to the interviews in their entirety prior to transcribing them for analysis. This process allowed the researcher to experience much of the interview again but without the pressure of being in the moment. Stepping back from the role of interviewer and performing a more active form of listening allowed the researcher to experience more of what was said as well as the nuances of the interview. The next procedure was the transcription of interview data. The audio files were uploaded to computer and transcribed by the researcher. The initial coding phase, which utilized open coding, took place once the transcripts were complete. Open coding, as described by Strauss & Corbin (1998) is "the analytic process through which concepts are identified" (p. 119). The researcher subsequently reviewed the transcripts in tandem with the audio files, listening to the interviews and reading transcripts at the same time. This helped to ensure that the interviews were transcribed correctly.

Transcripts, field notes, and the research journal were imported into NVIVO. NVIVO

provides for the importation of both internal and external sources. Several websites, audio files,

and a panel discussion at Tulane University by the Women of the Storm, were imported into the

program. Additionally, notes from the researcher taken while viewing several documentaries

including *When the Levees Broke* and *The Axe in the Attic*.

NVIVO facilitated the development and coding of themes that were both common among

sources, as well as unique themes that emerged throughout the course of the research. These

themes are discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Connectivity between and among ideas was also

supported by NVIVO software. NVIVO enhances the capability of the qualitative researcher to

analyze documents and text-based information, thereby more quickly recognizing themes and

patterns. Within NVIVO, the researcher analyzed the data by sentence and paragraph, and

through document comparison. In addition, NVIVO provided an exceptional environment for

triangulation among and across sources. The ability to upload field notes, the research journal,

and extant data into the NVIVO project allowed search and retrieval of sources that held

common themes and identified those that were distinct or free nodes appearing within either a

transcript or a note.

Strategies to Address the Quality of the Research

Several strategies were employed to address the validity and reliability of the data

collection and analysis. As discussed by Krafting (1991), these included engagement in the

field, field notes and a field journal, triangulation, member checks, an interview instrument to

guide the process, rich descriptions, an audit trail, peer review, coding procedures, a

confirmability audit, and reflection of the researcher within the field journal. To meet the rigor of these strategies, the researcher has taken several important steps.

Jin (2007) described the strategies to enhance credibility as:

- prolonged engagement including multiple meetings with participants

- triangulation such as referencing multiple sources

- member checking which included verification by participants about experiences

- peer examination requiring feedback from other qualitative researchers

To meet the goal of triangulation, data sources were compared between sources as well as among those sources, such as interview transcripts. The diversity among the participants supported the triangulation of the data and supported validation of results (Groenewald, 2004).

In addition, a peer review process was used to provide for consistency and validity in coding and themes. The peer reviewers were two individuals, who experienced Katrina either directly or through family associations, are living or lived in New Orleans, and have a background in academic research. The familiarity of the peer reviewers with both the context of the study as well as their backgrounds as researchers provided for additional credibility for the study results. The peer reviewers were provided with a description of the study including background, context, purpose, and research questions. In addition, they were provided with the thematic results of the data analysis and descriptive information of the themes. Each peer reviewer was given several weeks to review the study and results and comment. Comments were provided back to the researcher via e-mail and telephone conversations. Both peer reviewers provided extensive comments on the Katrina crisis and the study. Peer review comments were also discussed with the researcher's methodology committee member.

Validity was also sought through researcher reflection on changes in thought processes, ideas, and the overall concepts behind the study. The strategies to ensure research quality and integrity followed in this study are discussed in Table 3.2 below and were adapted from Krafting (1991) and Ratcliff (1995).

Table 3.2. *Strategies to ensure research quality.*

Strategy	Research Step	Process
Credibility	Engagement in the field	Researcher was on site in New Orleans for interviews, observations, and data gathering.
Credibility	Reflexivity	Researcher maintained notes and field journal for all contacts, phone conversations, and time spent in the field. Reviewed entries for data analysis and researcher reflections.
Credibility/Dependability/ Confirmabilty	Triangulation	Researcher used observations, interview data, journal, and reports and documents to triangulate themes and results and inform discussion.
Credibility/Validity	Member Checks	Researcher provided data gathered from interviews for review and further comment to participants.
Credibility/Dependability	Peer Review/Independent Checks	Researcher provided themes and results to peer reviewers who were both experienced researchers and knowledgeable about the topic.
Validity	Divergence	Researcher reviewed journal and notes to see trajectory of assumptions from beginning of research to completion.
Validity	Use of Quotations	Researcher utilized transcripts and quotations in research and thematic development.
Dependability	Audit Trail	Researcher maintained audio, journal, transcripts, field notes that illustrate steps and evolution of research.
Dependability	Detailed Description of Methods	Researcher provided detailed description of research process.

Dependability/Reliability	Coding/Recoding Procedures	Researcher reviewed transcripts by listening to audio; identified first codes in NVIVO; listened to audio again; recoded final round.
Transferability	Rich description	Researcher acquired rich descriptions from participants via interviews as well as via observations.

Ethical Issues

There are several ethical issues to address. First, in working with human subjects, especially those who have lived through traumatic events, it is important that the researcher undertaking the study has appropriate preparation in the research approach, in this case, qualitative research. This researcher has gained substantive experience through in depth qualitative research courses and through the experience of conducting a pilot study under the guidance of an experienced qualitative researcher. In addition, the researcher gained experience in the design and analysis of qualitative data through an independent study using NVIVO software. Finally, the researcher also served in a peer review capacity for a doctoral student's qualitative research results including coding of interview transcripts. Second, it is important to retain the confidentiality of the participants. Finally, due to the nature of the research, it is the intention and obligation of the researcher to maintain an audit trail. This will support reliability and credibility of the results.

Chapter Summary

The methodology that supported this study, namely the utilization of a qualitative case study approach, helped to maximize the emergence of themes and context significance of this study. As the purpose of the study was to explore experiences of a group of individuals who have collectively acted in a crisis leadership capacity, this approach elicited a rich picture of the

nature of these phenomena. This approach facilitated the answer to the research questions

regarding leadership formative and learning experiences that contribute to leadership learning

and development.

Chapter 4

Results

Chapter 4 presents the results of this study. Introducing this chapter is a brief review including purpose, research questions, and methodology used in the conduct of the study. The majority of this chapter is dedicated to a report of the findings of the data collection and analysis phase. A summary of the findings will conclude the chapter.

Review of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the group of women that comprise Women of the Storm (WOS) as they relate to leadership throughout the Katrina crisis. These women, both individually and collectively, have undertaken leadership roles in the vacuum of leadership that characterized the series of crises brought on by Hurricane Katrina. The study centered on the experiences as they related to the following research questions:

1. How did the events related to Hurricane Katrina influence and motivate the participants to become leaders?

2. What life experiences did the participants have that influenced their ability to assume a leadership role during the crisis?

3. How are the actions of this group relevant in the context of leadership during times of crisis and what can be learned from their experiences?

A case study from multiple perspectives methodology was used to explore the experiences of the participants as they related to the research questions at hand. In depth

interviews with fifteen participants were conducted in New Orleans. One interview was

conducted by phone with a member of WOS who had been present at the executive board

meeting but unable to schedule an in person interview in New Orleans. Observations, informal

discussions with other New Orleanians were held and noted in a field journal. All interviews

were reviewed by the researcher through active listening, then transcribed and coded using

NVIVO. Open coding, which generated themes and categories, was followed by axial coding

and constant comparison of the themes. This process resulted in five primary themes: 1) the

impact and extent of Hurricane Katrina and the ensuing crises, 2) the vacuum of leadership after

Katrina and the ensuing consideration of what leadership means, 3) the role of WOS throughout

the Katrina crisis, 4) the experiences related to leadership development, 5) the emergence of

citizen leaders, and 6) networking among people and organizations.

The Impact and Extent of Hurricane Katrina and the Ensuing Crises

As discussed previously, Hurricane Katrina was not a crisis in and of itself. Katrina as a

hurricane had actually not made a direct hit on New Orleans. The crises that resulted from the

storm were primarily caused by the breakdown of the levee systems protecting the city and the

unprecedented breakdown of traditional leadership at all levels. The participants saw their

emergence as leaders—and their motivation to act—deeply entwined with the utter devastation

and the crises wrought by Katrina. There were three primary areas that radiated from the impact

and extent of the Katrina crisis. First, there was the simple physical devastation wrought by the

storm and the ongoing, evolving nature of the crisis. Second, there was the emotional and

personal impact of the storm which fostered in the women the near obsession and drive to "do

something". Finally, the realization that the Katrina crisis was an opportunity for change was a common theme throughout the interviews.

Devastation beyond anything.

The physical extent and enormity of the disaster is still, in many ways, incomprehensible to the members of the Women of the Storm. It was vital to the participants that others understand that this was not just a hurricane. The devastation was "beyond anything" and was frequently described by participants as "horrific". As this was also a major focus of the WOS efforts to show the devastation to those in Congress, the extent of the disaster plays an important role in understanding the motivations of the group. One of the women explained that people simply didn't understand what had happened, and how bad it was. She said, "This is so far outside anyone's experiences. Anyone in the United States". They didn't expect that anyone who had not seen the devastation in person could truly understand what had happened.

The devastation gave the participants the sense that they had somehow been transported to a third world country. They felt, at times, as if they lived on the edge of civilization. In describing the physical damage wrought by the events one woman stated:

> I don't think people really got how horrible it was. Until the horror was
> over….if that makes sense. We came in three weeks after the storm. We had
> watched it and heard about it on and on. But until I got here and saw it….I
> had no idea what it was really like. I mean this part here [her neighborhood]
> was okay. There had not been any flooding. But I literally was shaking. The
> breadth of it…the overwhelming horror of it. I don't think people understood.

And it is not an excuse. I am not condoning it, but I think it was so different

and so overwhelming.

This response was not unique. Most of the women referred to the devastation in a similar

manner:

The city, every single possible thing, just overwhelming. The institutions

were flooded…. the police, they didn't have any office precincts! They were

flooded. And schools were flooded. It was so overwhelming. The city was

flooded…an entire city!   I keep going back to that. With people everywhere

and no way to get them out. No communications, nothing.

Echoing these sentiments, one woman pointed out that it was not necessarily damage

from the hurricane, but the omnipresent water that caused so much destruction. She said, "The

water just sat in the city and just melted it!   It was just horrible."

Fear gripped many of the women as they heard the levees had broken:

It is sickening to think back, sickening. And nobody knew what would

happen if the water came into your house. Nobody even knew. We were

looking at maps, and wondering if it had broken at this particular part of the

levee or that part. We all worried…had it made it to our street yet?

Others noted the strangeness of their once boisterous and lush city:

You can't imagine how it was. There wasn't a leaf on a tree, nothing!   There

was nothing green. Like there had been a nuclear explosion. You [referring

to the researcher] see how green it is? There was nothing. I could see blocks

that way because there was no vegetation. It looked completely different.

Descriptions of the city as being similar to images of war were common:

I would not have wished to be having this conversation for anything in the

world because it is very hurtful to have seen the place that you love and you

lived in as horrifying as it was in the Fall of 05. The city just totally

underwater. Everything was brown and grey. It was the saddest place you

can imagine. Except for some of those places that were blasted to smithereens

at the end of World War II or in Vietnam. Burnt by napalm. I am sure those

scenes were more horrific than what we came home to, but it was stunning. It

was so stunning that men, women, and children, particularly grown men and

grown women, at the drop of a hat would be in tears. And it would be hard to

explain at that particular moment what had gripped you so to bring you to

tears.

Tears were common and as described above, seemingly fell randomly and at a moment's

notice. The crying was universal, as described by one man interviewed for the film, *Axe in the*

Attic, "You know when men cry, tears come into my eyes, you stop any man on the street and

talk to them and they will be crying in five minutes. Not just at funerals…anything".

It was often impossible for the women to describe the city in terms that they felt could be understood. One woman simply described the city as a "virtual junkyard" as the trash, debris, and chaos was everywhere. The massive nature of the problems made it was difficult for those in the city to take action. As one woman said, "I mean the city was overwhelmed! It was sorta like…where do you start? If you came soon after the storm you would have thought it was bombed out."

There was also a feeling that the rest of the country did not quite understand the impact, that every part of a person's life had been dramatically affected. One recurring theme throughout the interviews was that of refrigerators. Although this may sound odd, this small mostly ignored aspect of all of our lives became symbolic of the disaster to such an extent that a photographic book was published about the refrigerators of Katrina. It brought together so many aspects of the crisis, a lack of services and electricity for months, a lack of food, the impact on all the citizens. Each refrigerator represented a family, a home, that had been impacted, and the discarded refrigerators filled the city streets for miles and miles. The refrigerators had been ruined because many of the residents had not realized that they would have to evacuate and stay out of the city for weeks and months. So the refrigerators, full of food, sat in the houses, the food rotting, mold and maggots growing. Most of the refrigerators could not be salvaged and had to be discarded. But they could not be discarded until they had been cleaned. The job of cleaning the refrigerators and the muck that was contained within them was appalling to many of the participants and again, representative of the extent of the damage.

One participant relayed a conversation she had with friends a year after Katrina. They also lived in a coastal area and had lived through hurricanes, but she felt they didn't understand the extent of Katrina. She told them, "We had no water no electricity. We had no services. We

had nothing". Yet she felt they still did not understand what "nothing" meant. Her friends had lived through a hurricane, yet had been able to return to their homes within days. Since they had also lost electricity the food in their refrigerator had gone bad and maggots had started to appear. They said to her, "Ya, I know we couldn't go back out to our house for four days". She responded, "Four days! What kind of maggot colony builds up in four days, come on! And I went on this tirade about refrigerators. And they all realized that I was taking it seriously. I said [to them] you all went through a major hurricane but you didn't get it how different this is from anything that has ever happened." The symbolic nature of the refrigerator also served to demonstrate a paradigm shift in how the citizens reacted to hurricanes. In 2008 Hurricane Gustav was predicted to hit the Gulf Coast. Much of the city evacuated. One of the women pointed out, "With Gustav there wasn't a speck of food in this city in any ice box anywhere." The people of New Orleans had changed. They rarely evacuated before Katrina. After Katrina those that could, cleaned out their refrigerators, took their treasured items, and left town.

The devastation caused by the flood and the surge of twenty foot waves moved the contents of houses around like playthings, leaving them lying randomly strewn across the ground. The force of the water was strong enough to impale a house with a car. The remaining wasteland was beyond the wildest nightmares of the women, including one who said, "I came back right after and saw all the huge mounds of garbage. I thought, I can't bring my kids back and raise them here".

This impact was visible for one woman in the faces of the survivors. She said:

> For some people, the water stopped at their house. It stopped within inches of
> their house. And the house next door was destroyed. It is just, I don't know.

You don't want to dwell on things, but I have seen photos strung together at presentations that look almost biblical. You see the people who survived the flood and you see how their faces are all like classical paintings, like religious art. That is exactly how it looked. The photos and the whole mess. It was of biblical proportions.

The long-term, lingering nature of the crisis boggled the minds of many of the women. One noted that in some areas it took months for the water to recede "…even in January, and the storm had been in September, property was still under water." It is also important to remember that with no services, electricity, transportation, food, and other items considered necessities of life, there was also no work and essentially "…if you didn't have a plan you were kind of stuck. A lot of people were stuck for a while." Many of those who remained found themselves without work and with only the option being to focus on the devastation. One woman described it as follows:

In the end, there was nothing else to do. Work was kind of nonexistent and so you would just drive around the city. Just look at the refrigerators. It was something that we didn't even realize would happen.

Those who still had the ability to work found themselves desperately trying to help those who had lost everything. One woman described her experience the first day she returned home:

I came back the first day we could. The phone rang off the hook. I was dealing with peoples tragedies. I was dealing with men who were hysterically crying on the phone… And this was just not men, it was men and women in

the community. After the storm 35 percent of that community [the lake front]

left. A good portion of the most generous benefactors of the community lived

out by the lake front and their whole family did. It was generational, and so

you saw families leaving. I can tell you my heart was broken in so many

ways, and every night after having listened to stories all day long, and dealing

with our own, I just said God Give me enough strength to wake up tomorrow

and listen to more stories and just to do what I can. But you just didn't know

at that point what you could really do other than just listen.

Before Katrina, after Katrina: A city's barometer.

The physical impact of the Katrina crisis was obvious and tangible. One could see the

physical devastation. But what was unseen and often unheard was the personal and emotional

impact of the ongoing crisis on the citizens of New Orleans. Many of them had lived through

hurricanes or seen floods or images of disaster in other places, but as one woman pointed out,

"well, things change when it is you. It is all about perspective. People don't realize…most

people until it happens to them."

Mental health became an issue for those who had never suffered before. After the storm,

one of the participants had suddenly taken to writing as an outlet for the stress. She described

her evolution from what she jokingly called "learning disabled" into a writer:

One of the hardest things for me to do is write. Yet after Katrina I started to

write. And they published them all. They [the stories] just started coming,

these 5 o'clock in the morning things, and I couldn't function until I got it all

out. Then I would send it off and they would do a little editing then poof!   I

had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven…that was it.

Isn't that amazing!

Her obsession to write was not necessarily about her own experiences. Her interests and

avocation placed her squarely in contact with individuals with mental health issues. Having

worked with individuals in the mental health field for some time, she noted:

What was really fascinating, after the storm, after the first year, is that it

wasn't my chronically mentally ill I was picking up. It was a whole bunch of

people who never had a mental health history. They were completely

devastated, helpless, hopeless, just unable to move, just paralyzed. I think that

it just took on a whole different meaning. And the other thing is those

working the crisis had been traumatized as well. You know we had been

through it, yet we are out there catching the people jumping off the bridges.

So the whole thing was very bizarre.

The mental health crisis spawned by Katrina, and the veritable stew of inaction and

support, also spawned a growing interest in her to help those who had been impacted by Katrina

by bringing mental health issues caused by the storm out into the open. This was done, in many

ways, through her writing. She described one of her writings as follows:

I wrote one [an article] called "Mental Distress: Don't hide it, Advertise it!"

Because right after the storm there was this huge billboard that said "You are

not crazy…call the help line". The billboard had this crazy looking person on

it. I thought, "Why would you say you're not crazy? We are all crazy. I

mean, we are crazy!" Call for help, advertise it!   There is not one person you

can talk to who is not crazy right now, due to Katrina. We are crazy. Let's

just get past that, we are crazy!

When asked if she still wrote, the participant reflected on the question, then said, "I kind

of stopped. I haven't written anything for about six months. So I feel like I have been healed."

Many were healed through the simple act of helping others. Powell (2007) writes, "thousands

began organizing with the doggedness of survivors convinced that helping neighbors was the

best therapy available for working through personal trauma—to keep "from going crazy," as one

New Orleanian admitted" (p. 871).

The Katrina crisis changed all of those who were involved. Whether an individual had

evacuated or had been in the city in the months following the levee breaches. Watching the

chaos and seeing the devastation had a deep impact on all the participants:

It changed every one of us. It couldn't not change us. And I think that I was

profoundly changed. And I would have to sit down and reflect or write my

memoirs to catalog all the ways it changed me. I mean for me personally all

the changes were for the better. In terms of, it just, it is a paradigm shift. As

to how you look at life, how you look at the world, your relationship to the

world.

One woman described her husband's experience:

It took him a while, a year or so later. Even now it is difficult for him to look

at any footage. He just doesn't do it. He saw some rough stuff. He saw some

things I know he never told us about. He was witness to a lot of things that he

didn't talk about. But you could see the impact it had.

Most of the women interviewed had not lost homes, family members, or their livelihoods.

Yet they were still driven to make a difference.

It is embarrassing that I could still drive around, not think about the storm. I

could drive to a grocery store. It is so incredibly lucky and it is not that I did

one thing smart. I don't even have a story about how I packed up and spent

hours in the car. I was out of town anyway. So I wasn't even having to worry

about where I would live. Some people, it was like *Grapes of Wrath*. They

drove around and stayed in different people's houses because they could only

stay a few days at someone's house without overstaying their welcome.

People have really powerful stories.

Having survived intact in many ways also brought with it a heavy sense of responsibility.

That was the day I was driving out to City Park and that was where one of our

sons lived. There was just miles and miles of devastation and I really lost it. I

could not stop crying and I was hysterically crying in my car. And then this

man, this workman, knocked on my door and said "Lady, lady…you need

help, you need help". And I said "No, no, I am fine", because I knew that we

had a house. And he kept saying "No, no you need help". And with that, he

handed me a bottle of water. It was a hot, hot day and he was outside. I

remember thinking it was much harder to receive than give. And then I knew

I had to accept his water and when I touched it, I just clutched it, and I was

holding on to it. And I couldn't let go. And he said "It is all I have to give, I

wish I could give you more". I thought, oh my gosh, this is the story of

Katrina. A stranger reaching out to another to ease their pain. As I was

driving home, I could not let go of this bottle. I thought you know, I was

christened by water, we drowned in water, and now he wants to save me by

water. And it is still on my dresser. That was amazing what that experience

did for me. It just gave me a tremendous amount of determination to do

something.

The determination to do something helped many of the participants see that there might

be some opportunity, some silver lining in the crisis.

Crisis as opportunity.

The idea of crisis as an opportunity for change is one that is common within crisis

leadership literature (Boin & 't Hart, 2003) This idea, known as the crisis reform thesis suggests

that there is dynamic potential during times of crisis that can be used to implement change (Boin

& 't Hart, 2003). Boin and 't Hart (2003) question the validity of this thesis yet the participants

in this study felt strongly that the two, crisis and opportunity, were closely intertwined. Pyles

and Lewis (2007) describe the Women of the Storm and other citizen led groups as exhibiting

remarkable resilience and stated that these emergent leadership organizations "recognized the

opportunities for change and reorganization that exist during times of crisis. They understand

that such a window of opportunity has the potential to transform individuals, organizations, and communities" (p. 389). One factor that may have played a role in the ability to make dramatic change in the face of crisis was the overwhelming amount of need. One of the participants stated,

> After Katrina it was like any idea might work. You just had to bring it forward. Because then those ideas would kind of take shape and you would just have to mold it within the environment that we were dealing with. I think anything would work. Now we can see what has been truly successful. I think that those new programs and services are still around because somebody noticed that there was a void and what existed hadn't been working out. I think that is where leadership really comes from. There is a void, somebody sees a need. They say, "Okay, let's try this idea." And they take that risk and in a situation like Katrina, there was an environment here where it didn't matter what you were putting out there to offer, people needed so much that people would come.

The pain and personal impact of the Katrina crisis and the drive that the women felt to do something was coupled with the idea that now was the time for them to act, to make a change, and to make their city better. For one woman, the crisis demonstrated that:

> The need was there and some people were trying to impact change. One positive aspect of the tragedy was that it created an environment where real change could take place. Women of the Storm played a role, Citizens [for 1 Greater New Orleans] played a role, but just a lot of ordinary citizens. I mean, I look back and I am very proud of what individuals did in our city. Katrina

had exposed the weaknesses and gaps at all levels, from schools to government leaders. But it also seemed to expose the strength of the community and its ability to come together to make change.

In responding to the crisis, one Woman of the Storm reflected on her work as the director of a neighborhood association:

> Looking back, knowing the work I was doing before the storm, it was almost like a perfect storm for me. Not simply because it allowed me to continue to be a leader in the community. But because I could hold all residents accountable in ways they had not been before. What I mean by that is a neighborhood where poverty levels were 32 percent and a neighborhood where we had a failing public school, mediocre library and public services and those who lived better did and those who did not, did not. So it was a real opportunity to hold people accountable to the things that we say are important in our lives and our community. So regardless of who the babies were in the classroom at our public school, it was time to have the entire neighborhood be accountable. To say--Hey, that school is in my neighborhood and I have a responsibility and a role to play regardless. To say--A poverty rate of 32 percent is not acceptable and slum lords are not acceptable. So those things were important to me before, but it was a real opportunity after Katrina because everybody was on the same, for a minute, on that same level playing field. It was the opportunity for the entire neighborhood to come back stronger. It was the chance.

As discussed earlier, mental health, which became an issue for many more New Orleanians during the crisis, was something that had not received much attention prior to Katrina. One of the women who worked in the mental health field felt that Katrina gave individuals a chance to step forward and:

> …the benefit of making a difference. Taking the opportunity of something so horrible and tragic and shining the light on the need that existed even before the storm. For me, I have been able to get mental health in the media. It is very, very difficult. But Katrina really highlighted the mental health needs and I took that opportunity to do as much media as I could on the plight of people with mental illness regardless of tragedy.

Like the mental health crisis that had hit New Orleans, the city's schools also found themselves in crisis. The schools in New Orleans, which had been taken over by state government just prior to the storm, were in a state of complete disarray. Katrina wiped out many of the schools, and this gave New Orleans a chance to start anew. Several of the Women of the Storm were—and continue to be—deeply involved in school reform. One of the women described the state of the school system:

> Our school system in New Orleans prior to Katrina was in shambles. It was the worst of the worst. And now we have more charter schools than any other city. It was criminal that we were allowing our children to go to these schools. As community leaders, as business leaders, I couldn't believe that people coming from another place would believe what was going on with our

schools. Now there is amazing change, astounding change, the things going

on with our schools, I want to see that continue.

Additionally, she suggested that prior to the Katrina crisis they "were just nibbling

around the edges. Since such a devastating thing happened I think we have been able to really

affect public education." This was achieved through collaboration, a focus on moving forward

out of crisis and taking advantage of an opportunity. For one woman, it was working toward a

better future:

> There are all sorts of people coming together in collaboration to help our
>
> schools. That is going to make New Orleans progress into the future. It will
>
> make New Orleans a progressive place where young people will want to move
>
> to because their children will want to go to these schools.

In addition to the school problems, there was an immediate need to address the threat that

the levees still presented. Individuals formed organizations and banded together to address this

issue—one that had been smoldering for many years with no action from policy and decision

makers. The subsequent successful effort to reform the levee boards was seen by the Women of

the Storm, many of whom were also leaders in this movement, as one of the major opportunities

for change that the crisis offered:

> The consolidation of the levee boards, for example, and consolidation of tax
>
> assessors. Clearly the latter had no direct relationship to Katrina but it came
>
> about because … Katrina was one of those paradigm shifts. There was no
>
> status quo anymore. People weren't willing to accept the status quo or going

back to old ways. We have had this major change and we are going to keep

making change.

The media covering Katrina also provided some horrific images of the plight primarily of

the African American population in the city. The result was an increased concern for reaching

out to those outside of their normal sphere and to become involved. It also helped to provide an

opportunity to discuss issues of race. Some of the participants discussed this and how it may

have provided an opportunity to open doors for communication on a sensitive topic. One woman

said:

Hopefully it is a part of the aftermath of the storm [this openness]. I was

talking with a faith based contact yesterday about race relations in New

Orleans and I was saying that we are different from any place I know of

because we have so much more common ground now.

Another commented that:

Racism has been the subject of a lot of conversation locally and nationally. A

lot has been said about it. Not much has been concluded. However, I do

think that in some cases, in very positive ways, the rebuilding of the city has

helped cement relationships between groups in the white community and the

African American community, also the Asian community.

Race was not a focus of this study, but the crisis did provide the participants with an

opportunity to discuss the issue and find common ground. For Women of the Storm, diversity

was an important component of their approach. This will be discussed in another section of this chapter.

As mentioned, the discussion of crisis as opportunity was pervasive. It could be that those who have suffered through a major disaster see a silver lining and must see one in order to move on. But it was a theme that resonated throughout the interviews with the participants. One of the Women of the Storm framed the hopes that accompanied the idea of crisis as opportunity in this manner:

> One of the things that has become my talisman after the storm was the Chinese symbol for crisis. It is made up of two characters--Danger and Opportunity. I don't think I am the only person who feels this way. When I say this I always preface it by saying, I didn't lose my home though I lost my business. We were out of our office for a year. So I was personally impacted. But I feel that there is so much more good that has come out of this than bad. It is easier for me to say because I did not lose my home. We are a different community, a better community, and we keep getting better.

Understanding the devastation and the impact of Katrina was, in many ways, a rite of passage for the researcher. In order to ask the participants about their experiences related to leadership and the Women of the Storm, the participants felt that the researcher must understand how Katrina and its aftermath had affected them and how it had impacted their city. It was also important for them to express their hope for change. Once this baseline understanding was reached, it was then possible to explore their experiences and discuss leadership.

Vacuum of Leadership

The research questions in this study focus, in part, on two important ideas: 1) how the events related to Hurricane Katrina influenced and motivated the participants to become leaders; and, 2) how the actions of this group are relevant in the context of leadership during times of crisis. In exploring these questions, it was apparent that it was the vacuum of leadership that played the most important role in their motivations to act as leaders. This vacuum also caused many of the participants to consider what leadership during times of crisis is and adopt many effective leadership actions. The recurring theme of the leadership vacuum provided insight into addressing both of these questions. There were several categories within this theme that emerged during the interviews. These were: 1) the role of the vacuum of leadership in motivating the Women of the Storm to assume leadership; 2) lessons learned about leadership during times of crisis; and 3) the consideration of what leadership in times of crisis means post Katrina and how it influenced their approach to the crisis.

      Motivation to assume leadership.

The desperate pleas for help that were heard on September 1, 2005 over the radio as Mayor Nagin cried "I need reinforcements, I need troops" were the most tangible sign that the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina was beyond the capabilities of the local government. Yet despite these pleas for help, despite images day after day of dead bodies, rotting garbage, demolished houses, the responses at all levels of traditional leadership were painfully slow, disorganized, and unfocused. Tyler (2009) states that "It wasn't Mother Nature that flooded the crescent city; it was flawed, fallible human nature" (p. 325). The flaws and fallibility of human nature were equally apparent after the flood when bureaucracy and blame became the name of the game.

There was, according to Brinkley (2006), a "chain of failures" (p. 39). These failures exacerbated the crisis. As one participant said, "There were two crises. First Katrina, then the lack of leadership." It was, in fact, much of the reason behind the creation of the Women of the Storm and their assumption of a leadership role.

The Women of the Storm who participated in this study all agreed that had traditional leadership functioned as expected, they, and others, would not have needed to step forward in the way that they had. One of the women said:

> I sometimes think that had government pumped and worked as it should, had
> the city worked with the state and the feds and it all worked as it should, with
> a good tight knit plan, well oiled and greased, these groups probably wouldn't
> have sprung up. The reason we emerged was because of that void and we
> filled that void.

The women as individuals felt a hopelessness and an abandonment that drove them to act. One saying, "There was such hopelessness. There was such an inability of our leaders. We couldn't get to any of them. It was like "No Response".

Another woman echoed this statement:

> There was nobody to call on your behalf. You had to form, and that is what
> happened with Women of the Storm. Which was a relatively bigger group
> taking on a big role.

The lack of leadership and response in the first few days of the crisis became somewhat of a harbinger of what was to come:

> The lack of leadership was on all levels. But the initial response could have been handled differently by the federal government. That initial response. It was downhill from there. It was liked you were doomed…doomed to fail because it just started off wrong.

It was also across the board. The participants did not point fingers at one person or another. To many of the women it just seemed that none of it worked as it should have. So much so that it was almost a comedy of errors:

> I don't think you can isolate one level or individual. But the federal government, the administration's response should have been different. And I think if the states response could have been different as well. The locals had to kick and scream to get some attention to save people in the city.

One woman still found the lack of leadership unbelievable. She said, "I just don't, I still don't understand the lack of response. I try to put my hands around that. Maybe you can shed some light on that after talking to all these New Orleans folks!"

Others were equally sparse and direct in their assessments, a conciseness of language that seemingly emerged from a resignation that the experience was over and the facts spoke for themselves:

And that is the end of the story. They screwed up. There is not a whole lot more to say when it comes to that.

Another stated simply that, "I think the stars were totally unaligned, totally unaligned. Across the board. Both parties. Everybody." While a third woman added, "In this situation, it was the worst from top to bottom—local, state, federal—it was just a total non working of everything."

Peppered within the comments related to the failure of leadership was also recognition of the enormity of the event:

> The lack of assistance and the lack of government being there? I don't blame [official] for all that. I think at the time [official] was pushing it away. I think there were all levels of failure after because nobody knew what was going on and nobody knew what to do. How can you be prepared for something like that? We can give tips now on what to do and other cities can take that and learn from it. But when a disaster comes like that, you have no idea. It is a very hard thing to control and make it work the way you want.

Reaffirming this idea, one of the women said:

> When you are in the midst of it what do you do? That takes a really special leader and we did not have that leader. I think there were some people who could have done something but we were just not fortunate enough to have them. I think the majority of leaders would have been just as frozen. We just happened to have some that were totally frozen. Totally. They looked frozen!

Another participant described her concerns in this manner:

> The most troubling question for me is what we perceive as our government
> being able to do, whether federal, state or local government. There were
> failures on everybody's part. Not just the inertia surrounding us. Nobody in a
> leadership position is blameless. But you can't say so and so is in this
> position in government so they are to blame. There is plenty of blame to go
> around.

One of the most interesting aspects of the failure of leadership was that those who were
not in leadership positions were able to take charge and accomplish things that would otherwise
have been delegated to government. One woman describes the actions of her brother in another
state:

> I have a brother in (another state) who called me and was furious. And I was
> sitting in some hotel and he was screaming, "Why can't they just do
> something…look at these people! Get these people help!" So with his church
> he put food and water together and he drove a few U-Haul trucks right here
> onto the causeway. He thought it was amazing that government right here in
> this state, that they couldn't get food to people. Right here. So here we had
> someone from (another state) who was helping.

Lessons learned about leadership.

There were a number of lessons the participants learned about leadership throughout their
experience. These lessons came at a high cost after having lived through a long, arduous vacuum

of leadership. The participant's reflections on leadership were underscored by an underlying fear of what might happen if a hurricane were to threaten the city again. If so, the participants felt there were several important aspects of leadership including planning and crisis management, flexibility and creativity, and the ability to respond quickly;

First and foremost, there was an expectation that leaders should have a plan:

> During a crisis there has to be a plan in action or a plan in play. My prayer, sincere prayer, is that there is somebody in one of those offices in Washington who is coordinating with somebody in one of those offices in Baton Rouge, who in turn is coordinating with someone on a local level. God forbid if this were to ever happen again whether it is here Alaska, Hawaii, wherever, that the government, the leaders are prepared to swing into action without having to guess what should be done. There are millions of examples of things gone wrong. The FEMA trailers, the formaldehyde, the tractor trailers full of ice that were never allowed to enter the state that sat in Tennessee. There are just millions of examples like that and I don't think I exaggerate when I say millions. We need a better, a thoughtful plan.

The Women of the Storm over time had taken their experiences and formulated a series of recommendations, all of which were based on their experiences post Katrina. In testimony before the Democratic National Committee, Women of the Storm founder Anne Milling provided perspective on crisis leadership and management for the future. The following are two of the recommendations proposed by the organization:

> Enhance the nation's preparedness for both natural and man-made disasters.

Disasters — even catastrophes — are unavoidable, but better planning and

preparation can mitigate the impact on the lives of millions, as well as the

economic impact on the nation as a whole. Consider: $150 billion in damages

for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; $21 billion from Hurricane Andrew; $20

billion from 9/11; $19 billion from the Northridge earthquake; more than $6

billion in six states affected by the Midwest floods this summer. The need is

clear. The federal government should have a comprehensive disaster plan in

place that efficiently coordinates the responses of all relevant agencies. The

architects and implementers of that plan should be emergency preparedness

professionals, and they should report directly to the President, not at a level

hidden deep in the bureaucracy (Women of the Storm, 2008).

Milling continued her testimony with additional recommendations:

Address federal issues that inhibit effective emergency responses once

catastrophes occur. The most obvious need is for first-responders to be able to

communicate with each other seamlessly. Some progress has been made, but

problems with non-compatible technologies continue to exist. City, state and

federal officials must be ready to work together, communicating effectively

and bringing appropriate resources to bear. We can't afford more FEMA

trailers polluted with formaldehyde or untold federal dollars spent trucking ice

around the country when people are plagued by thirst — ice that's eventually

allowed to simply melt away after $12.5 million was spent to keep it frozen

for almost two years!   Resources necessary for effective disaster response

should be stationed within range of every area of the country, and public/private partnerships should be developed for everything from evacuation transportation to the most timely supply chain operations post-catastrophe. And, critically, the Federal Emergency Management Agency should be staffed top-to-bottom by disaster-response professionals and resume its reporting structure directly to the White House (Women of the Storm, 2008).

As suggested, these opinions and recommendations were based on experiences of their own. These had been bad experiences in the midst of a void of leadership and planning. One of the participants responded to the commentary about the 2008 testimony and reflected on the situation during Katrina, "But back then there was no plan, nobody stepping up and it all [the leadership] was totally useless". After pointing out that there was a "vacuum of leadership", one woman went on to say, "There are people out there who could have come down, come in. I mean, crisis management—we were in crisis! People go to school to learn that and where were some of these, all of these people?"

One of the women who had worked in strategic management in the past said:

It is better to put fences at the top of a cliff than ambulances at the bottom. That is my whole orientation. So I think about strategic planning, crisis management and prevention and that was not going on. And when you think in terms of preventatives and crisis management then things like this don't happen as easily. You still have tragedy but you can mitigate the effects. So the lack of crisis management and the lack of preventative thinking is one of

those lessons to be learned. We have a lot of lessons to be learned that the

nation can benefit from.

A complimentary idea that emerged was the ability to take a plan and be creative with it, be flexible, and find the right fit for the right situation. One woman said:

Why didn't somebody come down here and say "Here are our steps…A, B, C,

D." Sure you may have to say "D doesn't fit the rule" but this is what we

need to get there. I mean it is amazing that work on the local level, we did it,

we have done it on our own. We have done it without help.

This ability to be flexible and creative in a crisis was demonstrated by what are often referred to as the heroes of the crisis—the Coast Guard. Horne (2008) points out that the Coast Guard, acting on information from the National Weather Service, which had done an exceptional job predicting and reporting on the storm, had prepared and staged equipment and personal beyond the recommendations of the time. They went on to save over 33,000 people by doing one simple thing—throwing out the plan and improvising (Ripley, 2005). An individual that the researcher met at a store in the French Quarter pointed out, "The Coast Guard, they were fantastic. They saved so many people. They did it right. We should have put them in charge!" (Field notes, 10/30/09).

This resonated with one participant who went on to say:

When I look at leadership I look at those who are not afraid to go out step out

of their scope of authority. I think that when you step outside your box of

authority that is when you really begin to exercise real leadership. But if you

stay within your boundaries then you are not really challenging yourself or

anybody else for that matter. I think it actually begins when you step out and

start challenging people. It may not all be good but it is what needs to be done

and then you start getting things done. Step outside and don't be afraid.

This was balanced by one of the women by the thought that in the end it is the people

who make the difference:

I think through it all that if there is one positive lesson that I can take away

from all of this is that eventually good does prevail. There is so much good

among people who want to do the right thing for people in need.

The delay in responding seemed to be of great concern. Many of the women felt that in

the immediate instance, the enormity of the situation might have taken some leaders aback. But

as time passed and little was done, it seemed that less and less attention would be paid:

I always tell people that despite the response, if there could have been policies

made and decisions made, commitments made within the first two to three

months we probably would have gotten whatever we needed. But after that,

the six month mark, it was business as usual. Nobody cared and no one came.

This sentiment was reiterated by another participant:

Now…a month or two into it, every single public official should have been

down here. That is what is inexcusable. Is that it happened and then there

was no response.

Qualities important for leadership during crisis.

The participants in the study did not simply point fingers at leaders. As illustrated above there were several levels of understanding that grew out of the experience. A common concept that emerged during the interviews was an evolving sense of the qualities of a leader during time.

Some of the participants considered this by exploring their thoughts on the qualities that a leader in times of crisis should have. One of the key qualities that emerged during the interviews was communication. The Women of the Storm had actively sought to communicate directly and frankly with their members and with those they met. They also openly communicated with other organizations in the city. Their experience with Women of the Storm solidified the idea of simple, straight communication. In the aftermath of Katrina, there was one example of direct communication. In describing what qualities would have been important, one of the women said:

> Oh my God, just talk to us, tell us what to do—communicate! Show an
> ounce of intelligence, show that they were good people. Okay, admit that this
> was a huge mess up and nobody was prepared. The really scary thing is after
> that nobody stood up and took a leadership role. General Honore did. He
> came in, I guess it was his army background and he was a tough guy, and said
> "This is what we are doing" and everybody just followed him. Nobody else
> did that.

Reaffirming the idea that creativity is vital in a crisis one of the women responded:

One thing working with Women of the Storm has taught me about leadership, especially during times of crisis is that there are those who have done extraordinary things. But in a time of crisis, it was very entrepreneurial what people did. There are a couple of women who have taken on the whole Army Corps of Engineers to hold them accountable, not just in New Orleans but all over the country to hold them responsible for the infrastructure. There is another woman here who took it upon herself to organize people to pick up the trash after the storm. So it was really very entrepreneurial.

Another commented that "qualities important in a leader are entrepreneurism, a focus and the need to get the job done and I think also to be able to share the work and share the glory and humility. "

One of the participants reflected on the qualities of a leader and described them in this way:

I think a good leader is one who develops a vision and recognizes a need and then can motivate and propel others to committing; one who understands and dedicates themselves to the mission; one who keeps all on message—clear and consistent message, and one who stays focused and stays the course— persistence is key!

In addition to creativity and flexibility the assumption of power and drive to act were important components of the Women of the Storm approach that was missing in the leadership at the time:

What I learned about leadership in a time of crisis is that a leader does

something! They don't wait to be asked! And since Katrina and my

experience with Women of the Storm I learned that the qualities most

important in a leader are an entrepreneurial spirit, an unstoppable

determination to make something work.

One woman expanded on this need for determination and drive saying it had to be

tempered with a dedication to a mission like both Women of the Storm and the organization she

established after Katrina. She said, "I just feel that the leader has to strongly believe in the

cause, and that they have to be highly motivated, persistent, and diligent in their efforts."

Another woman suggested, "Optimism and the can do spirit. And it is amazing what can get

done if no one cares about the credit. No one cares who gets the credit. It is amazing what can

get done in society!"

In one interview, the idea of trust emerged. When asked if Katrina and working with the

Women of the Storm had increased her understanding of the role of trust the participant

responded:

I think that it is more about looking for ways for accountability. Trust is a

nebulous thing. Saying I don't trust you. What does that get you? Saying I

am going to work to put some systems in place that are not based on trust they

are based on accountability. Whether I like you or I don't like you I am going

to be able to tell whether or not you did what you said you would.

One of the important qualities of the Women of the Storm was the trustworthiness of the founder coupled with her "ability to get things done" according to one of the participants. This example and many others like it had led the women to expect more and to hope that leaders would do more. One woman stated when talking about an official, "he gets things done; people under him get things done. Things are flowing more freely now because of it. You can really see the change if you are involved in it, you see what has changed." In discussing another new government leader, a woman said "But he is a different caliber of elected official than we have seen. That is what I see Katrina…what that did. That we are both attracting and supporting a different kind of elected official."

One clear lesson that the women learned was that it was no longer possible to wait for others to help, for others to take action, that they now felt the individual had to be responsible. This lesson was learned the hard way, by watching their government, at all levels, fail to respond to the crises of Katrina. One of the women stated it simply, "It was a very good learning experience for me…that you really do have to take it upon yourself to make things happen. You can't trust in your government."

But in the end, one woman wondered, does the simple act of being elected or taking a leadership position change an individual? Her concerns were spurred by her own potential connection to elected leadership. She said, "He will be a good leader. He plays by the rules, very ethical. I think people who enter politics probably are and then something happens to them and someone steals their soul….Oh my God!" [laughter]

Women of the Storm

The Women of the Storm as an organization was born from the waters of the devastation caused by Katrina. In discussing their experiences, the women expressed several common sub themes. These included: 1) the need to do something, take action; 2) planning and strategizing to storm Capitol Hill in less than twenty days; 3) serving as the face of the devastation; 4) the consideration of their need to protect the city; 5); the impact of the Congressional visits; 6) their own leadership evolution; and 7) the personal impact of the Women of the Storm.

Someone needs to do something.

Months of inaction had bred within the citizenry a desperate need for action, for movement, for some end to the seemingly endless crisis that had begun that day in August. By Thanksgiving of 2005 it became apparent to the women that, despite their near obsession with the crisis, the feeling outside the Gulf Coast, especially in Washington, was quite different. Many of the women felt abandoned. That is what happened with Women of the Storm. They felt the need to do something, take action where no actions were taking place. According to one woman, "it was kind of like either you are going to sit here and live in it and wait for someone else to do it or you are going to do something about it. I kept telling people we better do something about it." Their call to action was from one women's' perspective due to "a crisis and a lot of inaction."

The stirrings of an idea that became Women of the Storm came from that feeling of having no one to call, no one to turn to and that the rest of the world had moved on. They felt that they had to save their city and "could not let this happen" (Pyles & Lewis, 2007, p. 386). The women became focused on being heard and on getting attention from Congress. The

situation was so dire and the devastation so vast, that it was impossible to understand unless it was seen in person. So the gnawing idea began to take form in November of 2005:

> By Thanksgiving of 2005 we were fortunate enough to be back home. We
> didn't suffer the damages here since the water stopped two blocks away, but a
> lot of people we knew had suffered. And so we invited for Thanksgiving that
> year a hodge podge of people. Sitting at the table, don't ask me why, a
> thought occurred to me. At the end of November of 2005 the numbers of
> people who had come here from Washington were even smaller than we can
> understand. So I just threw out the idea, because it was all you could think
> about, all you could talk about, it was Katrina, Katrina, Katrina. Also we
> were constantly paying attention to what the feds were and weren't doing. It
> just occurred to me that we needed to invite members of Congress here so
> they could see it. They needed to see it. So then we went through December
> and we went to a lot of places. There was something gnawing at me and I
> threw the idea out at the places we went but nobody took the bait. Then at
> Christmas my children had left and I thought something is just pulling on me
> to pursue this idea. Everybody thinks it's great but nobody knows how to do
> it...Give an invitation to them like any southern lady might do. So anyway,
> everybody at the table said "Great idea" but nobody knew how to do it.

While the idea fermented in the minds of the women in New Orleans, the *New York Times*, in its editorial on December 11, 2005, "Death of an American City", called out to the rest of the country and decision makers for help and for action. At the same time, the people of New

Orleans worked as many angles as possible. Citizen led organizations emerged almost overnight

and with increasing numbers as the lack of effective response continued. These groups were

involved in a wide range of actions, from gathering up the staggering amount of trash throughout

the city to demanding change in state and local governments approach to the levee boards. Still,

the attention and funds needed to truly address the city's crises were nonexistent. Numerous

citizens became members of the Fleur-de-lis ambassadors who traveled at their own expense to

major cities, newspapers, and media outlets trying to garner the needed attention and funding to

stem the tide of decay. Many of the members of the Women of the Storm also worked with the

Fleur-de-lis effort:

> We did the Fleur-de-lis ambassadors. They were formed a little after the
>
> storm and it consisted of people like me and other men and women. We
>
> would go in small groups of three to all the different cities in the US. We
>
> were basically ambassadors and would say here are all the misconceptions
>
> that you all have.

Yet the response from the federal government was still missing. To the women who

became the Women of the Storm, the issue was not just New Orleans, it was Louisiana, it was

the Gulf Coast and only national level leadership could address the crisis now facing the country.

One of the women stated it in this manner:

> Impacting members of Congress beyond our delegation was clearly what
>
> needed to be done. I remember in the first days after the storm and people
>
> would call me and ask what could they do. I would say pray for us and
>
> contact your Congressperson. Because it was self evident that we needed to

make them pay attention. First of all the immediate impact was felt here, but

it did have ramifications beyond New Orleans and we needed broad political

support from Congress and from around the country.

Planning to storm Capitol Hill in twenty days.

It was this part of the Katrina puzzle the Women of the Storm selected as their challenge

and their call to leadership. The question remained, how to make it happen:

On January 10th, I invited a small group of women who had a track record in

terms of accomplishments. I said, "I want you to come here and I want you to

listen to this idea. It might be the shortest meeting you have ever attended but

I want you to come." And they came and it was phenomenal. Everybody just

jumped on it and said, let's do it, let's go. It was really a remarkable

chemistry that occurred at the table. We have to go back to the fact that these

weren't my closest friends at the table, it wasn't my family, these were diverse

women, younger than I, who all jumped on board and thought it was fabulous.

In twenty days, between January 10th and when we left on January 30th, what

these gals accomplished was mindboggling. They really did it. I am just in

awe.

What started as a gnawing feeling had turned into an obsession to go to Washington DC

and get Congress to listen to what the real situation was in New Orleans, had suddenly become a

reality. Within those twenty days, that initial group of women sitting around a dining room table

had grown to 130 women prepared to storm Capitol Hill.

While the challenge of gathering a large group of women to make the trip had been met, it was also important to develop a strategy, message, and approach. The group believed that their message must be clear, their mission and message focused, and their goals straightforward. They had one opportunity to make a difference and make an impact and it had to be effective. They truly felt that should they not succeed, their city would never reach the recovery stage. One woman stated it plainly, "That was a very simple, very focused mission. Come down and see what happened. Simple, just come down and see." The goal of the Women of the Storm was to get Congress to New Orleans and to the coast to see the devastation. These trips, incidentally, would not be at the taxpayers cost but would be covered by other means.

The impact on the Congress members who visited would, so it was thought, be immediate:

> The mission was to bring members of Congress who travel the world looking at things to travel to New Orleans to see for themselves what it means when a city is 80 percent flooded.

However, it is important to recognize that the Women of the Storm were not simply looking for compassion for the people, though that was in large part what they focused on. They knew that strategically and for the long term, garnering and keeping attention had to be meaningful on multiple levels. As one woman stated, "we were very organized about it, very strategic, we had to be." The simple message of coming to see the devastation was punctuated with facts about why the region is important to the country:

> The message of the Women of the Storm was to impart that it is not just New Orleans it is a whole region that stretched from Alabama to Texas when you

take into account Katrina and Rita. We had to educate people on the economic impact of this region on the country. For example, the port and the seafood industry. One of the things I think the Women of the Storm did a really good job on was to distill those points in a way that was easy to convey to people. The big part of the message of the Women of the Storm was you need to care not just out of compassion for this community, but because there are issues that lead us to where we are that are of concern to you as well.

One of the women stated:

Women of the Storm was a good way to get the message out because this is really a national issue, we need people down here, and we needed people to pay attention and do something down here. At first for our recovery and now for the wetlands and what is happening down here. People don't realize if they don't take care of Louisiana it will change our country. In 50 years. If we continue to lose our coastline and the gulf coast it will impact the county. People don't realize that 20 percent of our commerce comes through New Orleans and through our port systems and 30 percent of our oil and gas comes through our coast line. We do not have the beautiful beaches of Florida we have a working coastline and it is serious and it is going. It is a national issue.

Clarity of purpose combined with the need to do something to save the city garnered the attention of women all across the city. As one Women of the Storm put it, "It was a very clear,

focused message, and I think it was easy to get all of us behind the initiative right off the bat." In twenty days the women had crafted a plan and a purpose and acted on both.

Diversity and the face of the devastation.

One of the key strategies of the Women of the Storm was to serve as the face of the devastation. It was not an effort to gain sympathy or even to evoke compassion. To the Women of the Storm they were speaking for a great American city that had been, in their opinion, forgotten by the national government. Despite the use of symbolism like the blue umbrellas, they wanted to be straightforward, real, and direct. As one participant stated, "We were just the face of this devastation. We weren't asking for ourselves personally we were no lobbying or interest groups. We were the face of the devastation and we were the real deal."

There was also a strong sense among the women that they needed to help bring hope back to New Orleans with them. They felt that a successful trip to Washington, DC would provide hope for the people of the region. This hope would center on the idea that Congress members would come and the crisis turn into recovery. On participant stated, "To be able to take it on a national level. There was definite hope. Things would change."

Establishing a message was just one important component of the effort to storm Congress but the membership had to be a large and diverse group that could work together well. This challenge was met with great speed and skill, as one of the women said:

> I was sort of amazed at how quickly such a large group became mobilized so
> well. Without conflict, without one upsmanship. You know what I mean. It
> wasn't a competitive group it is not a political group.

This quality of being the face of the devastation was all the more real because of who the women were. As one of the women stated:

> We were so naive and I think that was part of the charm. We had no lobbying
> group, we were housewives and grandparents and business women and we
> were not Washington centric or anything like that, we were not. We were just
> the face of this devastation.

Diversity within the membership also became a primary concern. For the Congress to see the face of the devastation, it was important to present them with a picture of the citizens of the city. There were 130 women yet, "the strength was not only the numbers but also the diversity of the women who came together". Seeking diversity among the women was intentional and, as suggested earlier, a very strategic decision. The intentional nature of the focus on diversity also allowed for the group to have very open and honest discussions about diversity issues. The devastation had impacted all levels of society and all races. The membership needed to reflect that diversity. There was directness about the effort, nothing hidden or otherwise left unsaid. One of the women noted:

> One of the things I had to accept as far as being in the group, I had to know
> that I was their diversity. And whenever we traveled somewhere it was
> important for them to be diverse. There were no jokes about that. B and I
> would have very frank conversations about it. She would say D, we need your
> help. We need you.

One of the younger members of the Women of the Storm at first responded by saying to the founder of the group:

> I am not there; I am young, go with the women who can make a difference.
> Go with women who have DC connections. I thought it was going that route.
> And she said "No, I want every type of woman, I want every age of woman, I
> want her to be truly impacted by the storm and I want women who are now
> working to help people recover. I want a very diverse group." That is why I
> went with Women of the Storm. It was all of us.

It was the first time many of the women had ever met each other. As one of the women stated, "To be asked to go on that trip was an honor. For some of us it was a real gift. And they made a big effort to diversify the group by age and race and interest." A revelation to many of the women, and one of the most valuable outcomes for the community was this cross pollination of groups, organizations, and interests. It blossomed into a greater understanding of the community that was palpable during the interviews. One of the participants responded to a question about the obvious openness and collaboration among the women with this statement, "I think what you are experiencing with the Women of the Storm is that we have found we have more in common than we have that separated us."

In addition to having diversity among ages and races, it was important that a broad spectrum of political beliefs be included. The organization is focused on being non-partisan. This non-partisanship is, in many ways, a Women of the Storm mantra. This is reflected in the group that participated in the storming of the Capitol in January 2006. One of the members described the Women of this Storm's approach to partisanship in this manner:

Women of the Storm is a great thing. It is a wonderful group of women and

we all bring something different to the table. This is good because we keep

each other focused on the goal. We are a non-partisan group even though you

can't help but bring your opinions with you. But the good of that is that we

are all represented. We have way right wing, way left wing but it is a good

balance and we know who brings what to the table and it is a balanced group.

The open nature of the organization combined with the immediacy of the crisis and

importance of their work engendered a true spirit of mutual respect.

The thing that is so interesting is that nobody is running each other over. Or

kind of jockeying for position or anything like that. Which I think had the

potential for being the case. I just think for the most part everybody is

respectful of each other and in awe of what each other can do. Because at the

end of the day the group always knows the truth.

Blue umbrellas: On to Washington, DC.

When the plane took off carrying the Women of the Storm on January 30, 2006, it was

difficult for the women to know what the result of their effort would be. Tyler (2007) writes:

The seventeen-hour whirlwind trip to Congress required massive

coordination. The inner circle had assigned each woman a partner for the

Washington visit, with each pair responsible for four predetermined

congressional offices as they carried out a full-court press on the afternoon of

their visit. Earlier information sessions made all of the women conversant

with the subjects of coastal erosion, levee protection, the extent of the city's

losses, and the importance of New Orleans to the nation and the world. Armed

with their trademark blue tarp umbrellas and joined by Louisiana's senior

senator, Mary Landrieu, the women held a press conference on the Capitol

steps, which CNN carried live. (p. 785)

The power of connections played an important role in two ways, first with the press and

second with the members of Congress. The press had been alerted through a prior relationship

with CNN. One of the Women of the Storm had been featured by CNN for her work after the

storm with the mentally ill. This contact then led to the CNN press conference. The press

conference that was carried live by CNN made a resounding impact on the members of

Congress. As one of the participants related, the initial idea of the Women of the Storm visit did

not necessarily result in members of Congress putting out the welcome mat. Many of the

inquiries to meet had been delegated to lower level staff or had not even inspired a response. The

CNN press conference on the Capitol steps turned the tide for many of the members. Suddenly,

as one participant recalled, "We were getting calls from Congressional staff members asking

why their Congressman didn't have an appointment to meet with us. Suddenly, it became

important to meet the Women of the Storm."

Personal connections also were meaningful in getting a meeting with one of the most

important and influential members of Congress. One of the Women of the Storm had an indirect

family connection to a member of Congress. This connection and the meeting it facilitated

resulted in one of the greatest successes for the Women of the Storm. The meeting unfolded as

described by one of the members:

I guess my most successful call was with [official]. I was very fortunate

because they let me go have these bigger deal people like [official] and

[official]. But where we were most successful was with [official]. We had

the most frank, honest conversation. It was really woman to woman. Finally,

she looked at me in the eye and said, "Well the reason you know I hadn't

come is because I didn't want to try to distract from what was going on". I

said "Whoa, you can tell me any reason you want but that is not right, you

need to come see this". She kept saying that she didn't want to interfere. And

I kept responding the same way. She then said" I promise you that I will

come."

This promise was coupled with an effort to reach out across party lines to meet a

desperate need. The participant continued her story:

Then she said I am going to go talk to [another official]. It was such a

genuine encounter. She then went to [the official] and talked to him. She was

the one who tipped the scale, I think, and said we've got to go. She then put

together a group of thirty-six members of Congress to get them all come down

to New Orleans. They came down in March and she has come every year.

And we have seen her each time we have gone back [to Washington, DC]. So

it really was interesting. I would say that that was truly an incredible

encounter. She gave her word and honored it.

A positive reception and response was often generated by the facts about the region and a dose of personal experience that the women brought with them to their meetings with members of Congress. One woman recounted how she communicated in her meeting:

> I know what I lived and what I experienced. I know what I have left now and
> what I am doing to help. What we are all doing to help and expressed it from
> that standpoint. And I was able to talk to them with a lot of stats that had been
> put together to give them the bigger picture.

The experience itself was new to most of the women who had never met with, much less stormed, anyone in Congress. They had gone beyond the bounds and outside their proverbial boxes in their need to save their city, and were desperate for any modicum of attention they could get for the region. One participant recalled her reaction when a member of Congress agreed to come to New Orleans:

> I mean, I have never really done anything like that, so you know we were just
> grateful for anybody that would take up our cause. You know it was
> just…there was such gratitude for one person who would say "Oh yes…I will
> be there."

The speed and intensity with which the initial effort happened also came as a surprise for some members of Congress. And the reactions were often surprising to the Women of the Storm. One member described the reactions she encountered this way:

> The first time we came up there, people were literally scared…they were
> shutting doors, running into bathrooms. Their eyes were really huge and we

walked in and we were like "Hey, we're Women of the Storm!" and they

were like "Oh No!" [laughter] It scared the hell out of them. I think they

were shocked by how many women came and the blue umbrellas. It was very

powerful. I think a lot of people were hiding in the bathrooms. [laughter]

Another member described her experience in this manner, "The first time we went people

were receptive. We met with a lot of staff, people were very helpful and I think they were just

shocked by all of these women there."

Throughout the descriptions of the Congressional visits, the participants alternated

between two different approaches. Part of the strategy was to be direct, clear, and frank about

the situation. One member whose neighborhood had almost entirely flooded said:

We had to be direct. And when I had a chance to be with [official] it had to be

the same way. Why just skirt things? Just say, this is what we need, this is

what has to be done. If you don't accept it, fine. If so, then let's just do it.

And that is how we were every time. When we went to DC, when we were

dealing with each individual, that is how we were.

In addition to being direct, many of the women felt that they had to be true to themselves

and their nature. Without extensive experience with Congress, it seemed to one of the members

the best approach was to be herself.

I am more of a speak from the heart person than a formal person. So part of

me was nervous from that respect. It was exciting. It was at the time not

many of them when we went on the first trip not many of them had come to

New Orleans at all so to try to push for that was certainly a big deal and

something I was definitely proud of doing. You felt if they came here and

saw… something might happen as a result.

Protecting the nest.

Gender was not necessarily a component of this study but it was a common theme among

the participants. Prior to visiting New Orleans, the researcher had been unaware of the

significant number of groups that had emerged after the storm which were led by women. Since

this aspect of the interviews was pronounced throughout the participants, it is important to

include in the discussion. The participants considered the idea of women and why so many

women were involved both in Women of the Storm and other groups that emerged to respond to

the crisis. One woman said:

> I really feel like a lot of the groups that popped up after the storm were led by
>
> women. I always say the women were nesting, you know. You wanted to
>
> make your house and your home a safe and a happy home for your children
>
> and the environment was in shambles and we were all trying to clean it up and
>
> put it back together and make everything perfect for your kids. At least that is
>
> my perspective.

Another woman echoed these sentiments by saying:

> I think that is we are all women and we are passionate about our community.
>
> If you are passionate, it is like a mother protecting its child. When the

situation arises you are going to do what you need to do to defend and protect it.

Some of the women reflected on how the approach of a group of women might be different from that of men:

> I think it is just special when women get together and when they do things together. Whether it is getting together for drinks or to change something in the community. Women just have a way of approaching things. We didn't go up there with, we went up there with umbrellas, not with weapons [laughter]. Women just have a soft, a different way, of approaching things. I think it did make a difference.

When asked her thoughts on why so many women were leading during the crisis, one Woman of the Storm responded:

> Because women always jump in when they see a problem. They have to. Whether it was their children or their home, even before women were working. If there was a problem that wasn't related to their husband's work, even before, they wouldn't say, Oh I think I will wait until somebody comes home and gets this fixed. You have to deal with it. I think that is why. That is my feeling on the subject.

The impact of women in general during the crisis did not go unnoticed. One of the Women of the Storm related a story:

G is one of our local news people. He is on the radio and his career is totally revamped. He was one of those people we listened to during the evacuation. He was forthcoming and asked the hard questions. He was talking to this group and he said that we are doing this ourselves, the citizens. And he said that he could the following because he was not a religious person and he is not woman. He said "if you are ever in a crisis you want religious groups and women because they come to the rescue."

Yet in the end the goal was ensuring that Washington and Congress saw the need to rebuild.

And when we think about Women of the Storm I always think maybe it is that search for nest and rebuilding a nest. But we wanted Washington to come down and give us the dollars to rebuild. It was getting those dollars.

A salient point was made by one of the women who said:

I think it made a statement that you had a plane full of people--whether they were women or not, going to Congress. I have got to give credit where credit is due and there was a lot of marketing savvy with Women of the Storm.

Congress comes to the Big Easy.

Once the Women of the Storm were able to get the attention of Congress, the next step was to get them to come to New Orleans, to see what had happened. The Women of the Storm, who developed and lead guided tours of the devastation for the visiting members of Congress,

also included others in the visits. Their purpose in doing so was to provide as broad and as deep a representation of the situation as possible.

The researcher was taken on just such a tour by one of the Women of the Storm. The tour lasted approximately 3 or so hours and involved seeing all the areas where the levees were breached, sections of the city where rebuilding had taken place and those areas that were still in need. The continued presence of FEMA trailers, the blue tarps on roofs, and the ever present X marks were noted in the researcher's field journal (Field notes, November 6, 2009). The X marks on the front of houses were done by the search and rescue teams. The process was described in the 2006 documentary *When the Levees Broke* by one member of a rescue team in this manner:

> When the team enters the building the mark the first part of the X. When they
> leave they finish the X. The 12:00 position is the date the house was entered.
> At the 3:00 position it is the number of hazards found. At the 6:00 position it
> is the number of bodies found. At the 9:00 position is the team that did the
> search.

While on the tour, the researcher noticed the holes in the roofs of houses and asked if they were the result of hurricane damage. Many of the members of Congress had the same questions as the researcher. The participant who served as the tour guide explained:

> A friend of mine and I used to laugh about our hurricane plans. They were to
> put an axe in the attic or even better a chainsaw in the attic. And at that time,
> we were joking! But it turned out that having an axe in the attic made the
> difference between life and death.

The researcher asked, "People went up there and couldn't get out?" The participant responded:

> People went up there and couldn't get out. And when the Coast Guard, the
> Coast Guard was fabulous, they rescued so many people. What they [the
> Coast Guard] would do is pull a vent, essentially lasso the vent and pull the
> vent off and pull people out that way. Either they heard banging or some kind
> of evidence that someone was in there and pulled the vent off.

The researcher asked, "Is that how most people died? From drowning?"

The participant responded, "Yes. From drowning. They were all stuck in their attics and had no way to get out."

This chilling thought must have also had an impact on the members of Congress who visited. To have been a visitor in early 2006 would have been both an eye opening and a traumatic experience. The devastation was beyond comprehension for many people and the impact on the Congress members who visited was immediate. Senator John McCain, one of the first members to act on the invitation of the Women of the Storm to visit the devastated coast stated after his tour of the area:

> It's necessary for every member of Congress to come down here. You can't
> appreciate the enormity of it until you come down here. We have an
> enormous long term environmental challenge here. I am for doing what is
> necessary.

These visits had to be an experience involving multiple groups, other stakeholders, and others who would be that face of the devastation. The Women of the Storm reached out to other organizations to help make these visits as productive and meaningful as possible. Tyler (2007) describes the visits as being a combined effort:

> …led by a National Guard brigadier general, Hunt Downer, with a concise seminar presented by three businessmen: Rod West, the head of the local utility company Entergy; Sean Reilly, an advertising executive who chairs Governor Kathleen Blanco's Louisiana Recovery Authority; and King Milling, the president of America's Wetland Foundation (and also president of the Whitney National Bank and Anne McDonald Milling's husband). Women of the Storm persuaded the Greater New Orleans Association to provide lodging gratis. (p. 786)

In most cases, those who had previously considered "bulldozing" parts of New Orleans had been converted by these visits to supporters and often proponents for the cause. The Women of the Storm had recognized that the act of seeing is believing. And they had created many new believers through these in person visits. By March of 2006, the Women of the Storm could state:

> Through the efforts of Women of the Storm, 13 Senators and 42 members of the House of Representatives accepted the Louisianan's invitation to visit their battered state, including key Congressional leaders like Senator John McCain (R-AZ), Senator Joe Biden (D-DE), Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-IL) and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) (Women of the Storm, 2006).

The results of both the initial effort and the subsequent trip to the Capitol by Women of the Storm was described in testimony at a Democratic national platform hearing by the founder, Anne Milling:

> We have met with significant success. At our organization's founding in January, 2006, only 12 Senators and 25 members of the House had come to see the nation's largest disaster. After two charter flights to Washington in 2006 — each carrying 130 women from the metropolitan area and south Louisiana to invite and educate our nation's leaders in person — and continued persistence in 2007 and 2008, we can report that, of the current 110th Congress, 57 senators and 142 members of the House have visited. Just last week, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Party Whip James Clyburn led a third Congressional delegation to our city, bringing some 20 members of the House to bear witness to the unprecedented damage, the challenges of rebuilding, the signs of progress and how Louisiana's recovery has direct impact on every state in the nation (Women of the Storm, 2008).

Particularly gratifying to the Women of the Storm was the response of the previously dubious Speaker Hastert, who had previously suggested bulldozing parts of New Orleans (Tyler, 2007). The Speaker stated after his tour with the Women of the Storm, "I saw things here I never expected to see in my lifetime, in my country. You have to be here firsthand on the ground to grasp the extent of the damage" (Tyler, 2007, p.787).

Tyler (2007) states:

Hastert's and McCain's conversions were representative of the reaction of most visiting lawmakers. Across the aisle, Senator Joseph Biden and Speaker Nancy Pelosi attested that Women of the Storm had had a significant impact in getting more attention for New Orleans. In June 2006, a previously reluctant Congress voted to appropriate an additional $4.2 billion for rebuilding Louisiana homes and businesses. (p. 787)

The successful efforts of the Women of the Storm to bring much needed attention and funds to the region also had an impact on the women themselves. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that many of the women had previously been involved in their communities as leaders of certain efforts, board members, and volunteers. Yet the experience of Katrina and the Women of the Storm had changed them from leaders in the community to leaders for the community. As one of the women put it:

I like the idea of the leaders in the community who became leaders of the community. I think that is it, it is very well said. I think there are new leaders. I think that is not yet 100% true but it used to be that if you were not the leader then you didn't play the game. There were a gazillion different groups because everybody had to be the kingpin. I think it is a good thing to say about us that we were leaders in the community and now are leaders for the community.

It also changed what the future holds for New Orleans and how it is viewed by the Federal government.

The women could galvanize the support to get the money appropriated by

Congress. Somehow I feel we have that ability to network and we can knock

on those doors. They know us up there. I mean, [official], I could go up to

him and if you said hey how about those Women of the Storm, [another

official] would say, Oh I know those women. I am serious there are people in

important positions who know us and respect us and that means a lot for all of

us here.

This respect stemmed from several avenues. The members of the Women of the Storm
were direct and honest and their sincerity was visible. In addition, their ability to cross political
lines and be non-partisan even as the Congress members began coming down to New Orleans
was vital to their success and the enduring respect they receive. Partisanship was set aside and
the focus was on showing the devastation and discussing the needs of the region. One of the
women stated:

Once they came, [Congress member] and [Congress member] and they really,

I will tell you by themselves just the two of them and did press conferences

with Women of the Storm and tours with Women of the Storm and they said

we need to hear about what is really going on. And they were able to get

other members to come and we really needed people of that stature in the two

houses to say—'Hey this is important'. Once they came you could see that

others would come as well.

The Women of the Storm were strategic not only in their approach to Congress, but they also demonstrated an aptitude for and understanding of the intricacies of working within the complexities of the crisis. They reached out across the political aisle, collaborated and communicated with other organizations in the region and country, and ensured that the delicate toes within the political realm at the local, state, and federal levels were not stepped on whenever possible. As one of the women described it, "We were all on the same page; we were in sync with the city, the state, the congressional delegation, it was just a consistent message." Other organizations, whose leaders were also members of Women of the Storm, were partners in the process. Whether it was a conscious effort or just an affinity for or need to focus on a particular issue, it seemed that the pie of devastation and response was divided among the groups with ease. One of the women described it in this manner:

> Everybody has a different angle and doing something just a little different. X
> was doing the garbage; Y was monitoring the Corps of Engineers, Z was
> doing more political reform in the city and we were Washington centric. You
> could see how…Certainly you collaborate and communicate but everybody
> took a slice of the pie to get it done which is so cool.

The impact of the Women of the Storm experience.

The experiences of the members of the Women of the Storm were described in several unique ways. From the impact the group had on the city and its ability to effect change, influence policy and bring desperately needed funding into the region to more personal impacts. Being a part of the Women of the Storm is an experience that change the lives of the people involved in ways that were unexpected.

One member described it as "a positive experience and I think we did make a change, we have had an impact." Another stated that they had achieved their original goal, "We encouraged Washington to come down and give us the dollars to rebuild. It was getting those dollars. And we did." It was a personally satisfying experience but, as one of the women stated, "you also get the benefit of making a difference, and you know taking the opportunity of something so horrible and tragic and shining the light on the need that existed even before the storm."

Yet in their discussion of their achievements, the women made it clear that it was not a matter of getting funds simply due to the devastation, it was that the region was important to the country economically and contributed to the national economic success:

> We were successful in getting the royalties and resources that this state
>
> desperately needs and rightfully deserves based on what we provide to this
>
> country in terms of oil and gas and seafood and the port. And so the fact that
>
> this state had not received anything for what it provides…I don't think folks
>
> across the country understand that 25% of the oil and gas is huge.

A second recurring theme in the interviews was the impact that the experience with Women of the Storm had on the individuals. They were proud to have helped the city in a time of crisis, but the experience had changed them as well. It had opened their eyes to both their community and to their inner selves and, as importantly, their relationships to others outside of the traditional boundaries of the society in which they associated. The Women of the Storm was enmeshed with Katrina but the women also had a choice. The women of the Women of the Storm made the choice to make a difference and lead. One woman describes it this way:

Katrina forever changed the lives of all of us who live here or lived here. I realize that that is not an earthshaking statement, because an event of that magnitude, if it doesn't change your life, there is probably something wrong with you. But whether or not we permit the change to be positive or negative has in many ways been the driving force behind the formation of groups like Women of the Storm. It would have been easy just to retreat. Especially if you had the financial resources to move. That would have been an easy way to deal with it. It hasn't been easy living here especially in the first year and a half.

Another participant, who had previously considered herself too young to take on a leadership role stated:

After Katrina because I was able to grab hold of opportunities that I wouldn't have had otherwise. I could see that there was a need and somebody's got to step in and do it. I didn't have the fear as I might have before about stepping in and not having as much authority. Or fear that I might not be able to do or accomplish what I was setting out to do. Katrina kind of stripped those fears away because it said anybody can step in, anybody can take over, because there is need everywhere. We saw what was going on in the here and how much everybody was reaching out and it really changed our vision. But I think I was able to have a lot more courage seeing what other women were doing with the Women of the Storm. All these women were taking risks saying "We're just going to do it!" There were no rules or all the rules were changed

and everything was kind of thrown up in the air. It was like where anything

fell, someone was stepping in to the place where they could have the most

impact. So that was one of the things about Katrina. It allowed me to step into

a leadership role and gave me a lot more opportunity than I might have had

before.

The strong sense of mission, belonging, and working for a cause stayed with many of the

participants. One of the women called it "life changing. Because everybody had the same

mission. It was every kind of women known to man!" The power of Women of the Storm was

this mission; it was this concentration of effort, and bringing together so many women who were

committed to make a difference. Alignment to a cause is, according to Janson (2008) a

leadership formative experience (LFE). It was clear throughout the interviews that such

alignment had helped to form their drive to lead. It was a source of empowerment. These women

had certainly been involved in their community, been leaders in their community but the Katrina

crisis had changed them from leaders *in* their community to leaders *for* their community.

In discussing the transition of the women from one type of leadership to another, one of

the participants said:

I serve on the board of an institution I am particularly fond of, an historic

house and garden. If I had not had Women of the Storm to be totally involved

in, I would have been trying to nurture that back. So we had a full time job

with that and there are many other institutions in the city just like that. There

was plenty for everybody and anybody to do to make a difference in the

effort. I love your sentence where you say that Katrina was an experience in

their lives where they changed from being leaders in the community to leaders

for the community. I don't know if those are your words originally but that is

pretty much the nail and you hit it square on the head. The things that have

improved here because people took that step. And there is a vast difference in

the IN and the For. The for required getting your hands dirty and rolling up

your sleeves and doing whatever it takes to get the job done. The In is serving

on a board, getting your name in the paper, adding that to your resume. The

people I can look around and thank god, there are dozens and dozens and

dozens, who made the leap from In to For. And that has been, for me

personally, the most rewarding thing about all of this. Even if I hadn't been

involved and there was no way I couldn't. But it has been so rewarding to see

people step into the arena and do whatever it took on their part to assist with

groups in the community. And there is a strong sense of common good. And

that is what bound these groups together. That is interesting. There is no

competition between groups in our area. Mainly because we have all carved

out something to work at or on. And so there is no sense of competition or

one-upmanship at all. There is a lot of "atta boys" and "atta girls" from one

group to another.

She also considered how this alignment to the cause was reflected among the Women of

the Storm:

One of the most remarkable things…when you have a group of twelve women

[Women of the Storm executive board] who work this well together, there are

within the twelve there are 8 who have been together from inception others

were added over time, there has never been a cross word. That is pretty

remarkable for a group of women. Never a cross word. There is a very strong

bond between us and among us. We often disagree as I am hoping we did in

front of you. We disagree and respect everybody's opinion but soon come to

a conclusion that this is a best way to act or this is the best path to take or this

is the thing to do in this particular instance. There is a great deal of respect

among us for differences of opinion. And trust me there are wide differences

of opinion. We come from different political views, economic stand points,

racial stand points; the common thing that binds us together is that we do not

have a personal agenda. Our agenda has to do with the city and keeping the

eyes of the nation focused on New Orleans until we can recover. That is why

it is difficult for people to react negatively when we come calling. Because

we come calling not for ourselves but for our beloved state, city and region.

The alignment to the cause was bolstered by even minor successes among the women.

One participant stated that that such strong women who had grown into leaders in their own right

during the Katrina crisis and then coming together as this larger group with a mission propelled

the effort for change and recovery forward. She said:

You are making real change and effecting change. And you start small and I

think that we are just now seeing light. And I think that for so long for all of

us who are trying to lead through this like the Women of the Storm in the

various capacities that they do day to day you would just get so overwhelmed

and you would think nothing is going to change.

Yet change happened. Each new success gave the participants a greater sense of their own leadership and also offered them the opportunity to reflect on what they had learned. One participant stated, "It has been a great experience for all of us. For me, getting to know the Uptown women. For them, learning more about us. For all of us, learning about the political process." One of the women described the idea of learning in the context of how she learned that she had the ability to lead, to make change, and how the experience of Women of the Storm changed both her perceptions and the perceptions of others as follows:

> As for Women of the Storm…I think because of the group of people, you
>
> know regular average women, it has been a learning experience for all of us as
>
> it relates to the political process, as it relates to advocacy, as it related to
>
> citizen involvement. So I think in that respect it has been a great learning
>
> experience. We have been to the democratic convention and learned about
>
> how to work in that environment. It has been a great experience as it relates
>
> to the different classes and races here in New Orleans. The other thing is just
>
> that it allowed us to show a different aspect of New Orleans and ourselves.
>
> When we traveled we were showing off our southern hospitality and in trying
>
> to bring people here it created a movement, not only from the Congress but
>
> also from the media and other people around the world. It gave you the
>
> opportunity to create something and be involved. I learned a lot and I can
>
> credit us for doing some great things because everyone was jumping on the

band wagon of getting people here and asking us to get people to come and asking us for help from the Women of the Storm. So many people asked us to talk to groups and bring people in. I had never done anything like that. I spoke to a (corporation) board and I went to talk about all the things we needed. We had changed. Most people knew us one way and we changed. You see yourself in a different light suddenly.

This new light, the concept of herself as a leader, was new to her and new to her family. She described the transition of her daughter's perception from the time they returned to New Orleans and saw the devastation to her work with Women of the Storm as follows:

I think as soon as we could come back to town my husband wanted to take us out and show us what had happened. And her response was 'What are we going to do about this—we have got to do something!' She feels great to know that her mother was active, involved, and made a difference. As time went on she began to have her classmates come up to her and say that they admired what we were doing and that they were grateful. Last year, I chaired a commission for the community and one time my husband was with me and they said to us "You make sure that he knows that you have the most important job in this family. You are the one!" So it has been a positive experience.

The experience of Women of the Storm itself also served as a means for healing among the members:

The Women of the Storm for me allowed me an opportunity to, there is such

healing in advocacy work, I find, and certainly for me personally you know

cause there was a lot the Women of the Storm did for the community, but on a

personal level, it literally healed my soul. It just healed my soul. It was

outside of my work, it was outside of rebuilding my home, it was partnering

with these wonderful women, some I knew, some I didn't, and traveling to DC

and you know on a personal level, it genuinely healed my soul.

She went on to say:

The work I do with the unit I often tell people that I certainly hope that my

intervention helps that person, but I sure do go home every night incredibly

thankful for everything that I have every day. You know you work the streets

with me and you will go home and just with all the "I wants" and you are just

so grateful. So that is the healing of the soul. And that is what Women of the

Storm was for me. And I would imagine many would echo that sentiment.

Several of the women were still surprised that so much attention was given to the group

and that a small group of women with little political know how, inside experience, or leadership

experience could have made such a difference. One woman described it in this manner,

That is our story! We sat next to each other on a plane and made a huge

difference. She made a huge difference. There is something so empowering

about Women of the Storm too. From the moment it was conceived the idea

in a very intelligent brain, it was something that everyone was going to grab

onto and make it mean something. And it means something different to every

woman in the group. We don't stay completely connected. And you meet

someone and you say I am a member of the Women of the Storm and they say

me too and you have a whole new connection. It just takes lift from there.

Another reflected on the experience with the following:

It took time to really think that we had done something and I know we played

a role in bringing attention to the crisis and helping the recovery people tell us

that all the time but I never just sat back and we never really had time to but I

never said—Whoa! I would have said more that these are the greatest women

in the whole world and I think that is what I thought mostly. I am just awed

by the commitment and the dedication and leadership, I am, really.

The long term impact of Women of the Storm was difficult for the participants to gauge.

They felt strongly that they would no longer expect assistance, they would take charge. They

also felt that this was true of others. When asked what they would want leaders to do in the

future to prepare or react to the crisis, one of the women said:

I would engage the citizenry because I think here in New Orleans and maybe

in other places just marvel at it, I think that we have become energized and

turned loose by this and I think in the future I don't think that they will be able

to ignore us. Oh maybe down the road we'll get tired and run down but I

think that they pay attention to us but I think it was that void that really

created us. I can see it. A giant void.

This realization stemmed from their own involvement with Women of the Storm and the knowledge that one person can lead and make a difference. This idea had taken hold with many of the participants:

> So as far as we have come now, realizing where we came from, that in itself is a feeling, a rewarding sort of feeling. I guess one of the things that has changed and I think will be a forever change in this area is that there is a greater spirit of volunteerism.

Engagement in the lived in world and involvement in one's environment and context results in situated learning (Kempster, 2006). Many of the Women of the Storm found themselves newly engaged in their environment and impacted by the context in which they now lived. This changed many of their perceptions about themselves as people and as leadership. One of the women said:

> Once I started getting involved and saw people needing to fight for New Orleans. I knew I had to accept it and that is one of the things that has happened to me. I now claim it. I call myself a New Orleanian. And now I do feel ownership and leadership. That was an interesting transition.

This ownership of being from New Orleans remained a surprising fact to several of the participants. Equally surprising was their rise to leadership. So much so that many of the participants had not really had an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and leadership development until the researcher entered into this uncharted territory by asking some questions.

Experiences Related to Leadership Development

One of the interests of this study was to explore the experiences of the members of the Women of the Storm as they related to leadership development and learning. Specifically what experiences did the participants have that influenced their ability to assume a leadership role during the crisis. Much of the data analysis supported the ideas of the leadership formative experience which have "a high impact on leaders resulting in learning relevant to their leadership" (Janson, 2008, p. 73). Formative experiences are those that change, help develop, or transform an individual. Experiences such as coping, struggle, and interactions with role models are considered leadership formative experiences (Janson, 2008). Integrating the work of

The members of the Women of the Storm had unique perspectives on how they had evolved into leaders and what influenced their leadership abilities. Some had held leadership positions prior to Katrina, though many were housewives or volunteers. These ranged from opportunities to learn leadership through education and role models, to a natural interest in leading. The responses from the participants fell into four major categories: 1) a personal history of volunteerism and community engagement; 2) educational experiences; 3) a natural inclination or interest in leadership; 4) role models; and 4) the experience of Katrina.

History of community engagement.

All of the participants in the study had a personal history at some level, of volunteerism and community engagement. From serving on boards of community organizations and schools to more intensive community organizing, the experience was common across all participants. Many of the women attributed this factor to their upbringing and family influence. These women were invested with a sense that individuals were required to give back to their

community. It was a part of their culture and that of her family, one saying, "I was raised that way." Another woman reflected on her family:

> They believed in giving back to the community. It is just in your DNA. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor you must give back. You must. Of course I went to a convent school so it is always giving to others. You live and breathe and you must give back. So that has always been a part of who I was so it seemed a natural thing to do.

This family tradition of working within the community provided some insight into their leadership development and was often combined with discussions of role models. One of the women noted:

> I have always been philanthropically inclined my father always said that no matter what you had you always give back and it was just the way we were raised. So I grew up in an environment where, especially my Dad was a role model in that sense always involved in the community and always participating. So I had that personal example.

Another woman echoed these sentiments by saying:

> Both my parents are very, very civic. My dad has always been involved in the community he has been president of big non profits as a hobby. My Mom was very involved she started a rape crisis center, and the YWCA, so she was always very civic, and as a young girl in the summers I was either volunteering at the (name of organization) or the home for boys.

A participant who was not originally from New Orleans described her introduction to community engagement as having been influenced by her husband's grandfather. This gentleman had been a lifelong resident of the city and had committed much of his life to being:

> …very involved in catholic charities. He was very philanthropic and when we moved back to New Orleans, he sat us down and in one of our last conversations he said "When you move back here to start your life, you can have a good job, you can have a nice life, you can send your kids to a good school, you can do all of those things but none of it is going to matter unless you give back to your community." He made it a real point to put that thought in our heads. That is really what sparked for me reaching out and going out and finding what is going on in the non-profit sector here. He was all about giving back.

In addition to being raised to be active in the community, one of the women had been raised in a particularly politically active family. There was an expectation that the women in her family should be knowledgeable and involved. She said:

> I had a very politically active family. My grandmother was the first elected women representative in the State House in X. Very active. And my mother was active. We were raised in a very active home. It was just the way we were raised.

One of the women stated, "I am very involved in the community I serve on several boards past president of the junior league. You could not be here without being involved."

Other women, specifically the African American women interviewed for the study described a more intense involvement, beyond volunteering; essentially they had a calling to do community organizing. One of these women described herself as a "child of the 60s" who had been "doing community development work long before coming to New Orleans" and "in the non-profit sector all her professional life.' She saw her "role was to be part of a change in the world." She concluded by saying, "I have always looked to be a change agent." Her current position in a non-profit had allowed her to focus on this work in New Orleans and more so after Katrina as her neighborhood had been severely impacted.

Another recognized that she had a natural drive to be involved deeply in a community:

> I am a resident of the X neighborhood. I moved here in X. My husband and I purchased our first home here after about a year and we were looking for a neighborhood and of course something that we could afford you know…off street parking, square footage a front yard a back yard you know all those things…a library in the area, schools in the area. All those things that are the fabric of a real community. We chose to buy in the area of the neighborhood where the needs were the greatest. A higher concentration of people living in poverty. More rental property, more slum lords, areas of blight. A criminal element that was more along the lines of drug trafficking not really violent crime. You know those key quality of life things that we all don't want to be around but at any rate we intended to intentionally move into this particular area this section knowing that I would play a role in helping the neighborhood reach its full potential because I could see that.

Her follow up explanation for why she was involved so much in Women of the Storm and in her neighborhood was simple, "I guess because I have been volunteering for a long time in leadership positions and another state at a national or international level. So when I came back here I was just a natural fit. I remember a sense of urgency to try to save a city that we love."

Several of the women felt strongly that it was the responsibility of those who had the ability or the luck to be the voice for those that did not. One of these women described her efforts:

> I have been involved in public interest work, from prisoner rights to children's rights you know. It is just…it is all about being a voice for people who may not have a voice. Or who may need to be empowered with their voice.

Another stated her strong sense of civic responsibility:

> There were only a few of us who were lucky and we had a responsibility. I think that that is really the bottom line. You think that 80 percent of Orleans Parish was under water for three weeks and most people couldn't get to their work, their homes, and for long enough that the mold took over. So that was huge.

Educational experiences.

Education, particularly Catholic education was a strong theme among the participants. Their early education had ingrained in them that they had a responsibility to serve their community. One of the women described her educational experience in this way:

> It goes back to the Ursuline nuns. I am a Ursuline alum. The Ursuline came
> from France in 1727 and basically created Catholic education in the US from
> New Orleans. Their motto when you were an Ursuline student is "Servium"
> "To serve". And I have this joke with all of my friends from then that the
> nuns just beat this "Servium" into us so that we think automatically that that is
> what we are supposed to do. If you have a volunteer job that you need to get
> done you are very well served if you can find yourself an Ursuline girl! Cause
> they'll do it!

Natural interest.

Janson (2008) describes the natural process or natural interest aspect of leadership development as "subjects must have naturally or without conscious effort taken leadership or had leadership thrust upon them (p. 82). Additionally described by Shamir et al. (2005) as having "a quality of obviousness, sometimes an almost fatalistic quality" (p.404). One participant described herself:

> I am super organized and that hasn't changed. Prior to the storm I was in
> different leadership type of roles growing up and as I got older I continued
> those type of things so it was just being organized on a much bigger scale then

I had ever had been before. I was very competitive. I think I am still. I get a

high off of having a project and seeing it through to the end.

This natural interest was apparent in one of the participants. She had moved to New

Orleans from another state and her decisions about where she lived were very much integrated

with what she would be able to do for her community:

And so when I got here and I moved into the neighborhood, it took me about a

year or so to get the lay of the land find out who the leaders were in the

community and I wanted to know just how are we addressing real issues.

Or as one woman described her interest in leadership, "It is a defective gene!"

The questions about developing leadership sparked some reflection about how Katrina

had highlighted the less than stellar leaders who were on the scene at the time. In coming to

terms with this and considering how to change this paradigm this comment was elicited from one

of the participants:

We can't blame it on anybody else. I think we just all have to try to do

something. It is very complicated. So yeah, the leadership, growing

leadership I think is essential. We have gotten away from investing in people,

we invest in things.

Role models.

According to Kempster (2006), observations of role models often can result in some form of leadership learning. This form of learning is not an imitation of others but does result from observations of others, it is "an interconnected process of situated learning and identity development" (Kempster, 2006, p. 7).

Role models played a key role in the leadership development of some of the women. One woman described it:

> I have certainly admired men and women. Particularly strong female role
>
> models. Some of whom I knew and some I only read about, who were willing
>
> to get out in the face of something that was perhaps unpopular. There is a
>
> wonderful story about a group of women who back in the Huey Long days
>
> organized themselves to try to sweep corruption out of office. And they in a
>
> sense remind me of what Women of the Storm has done. Although what we
>
> are doing is certainly not to try to better a bad government, what we are trying
>
> to do is keep focus on the city at the national level until the work is done. I
>
> have always held people like that who are willing to step out of their social or
>
> economic or racial comfort zone and make a stand.

Another woman highlighted a long standing relationship with her role model:

> I had been very close to Lindy Boggs and it was as a young housewife and
>
> Lindy and I had a wonderful relationship and continued to have that all
>
> through her career. Even when she was the ambassador to the Vatican and we

went to see her and lots of things about Lindy. I loved the way she projected

herself. If I had to pick someone a role model it would be her.

One woman reached back into her childhood to conjure her idea of a role model:

W ell, you know I think it is a combination of things. You know always I can

remember as a child FDR…that really dates me. FDR died when I was five

and I used to sit and listen to his fireside chats and his voice was so reassuring

and I can remember going to the grocery with my mother and we knew about

submarines at the mouth of the Mississippi and blackouts at night and he

really inspired me.

One of the participants described her mother as her first role model and reflected on the

work her mother had done for the community when she was a teenager. She said:

My role model…I guess my own mom, who did so much growing up with the

community. She worked for [a state] and started a MADD and SADD

program at my school. She really reached out in to the community and

gathered a ton of support for these after prom parties and made them really

fun and appealing. It was a really great thing for me to see how strong she was

and how much she could do to make change in our own little tiny town. She

was really my first role model in terms of what I am doing now.

Role models were important for forming early desires to be leaders in the community.

They inspired the participants to become community organizers, work in the non-profit sector,

and give back to the rest of the world. But the key to true leadership development for the participants was Katrina.

Katrina: The leadership trigger moment.

In alignment with the work of Janson (2008), Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler (2005), and Shamir and Eilam (2005) the early experiences of the participants included a broad range of leadership development experiences including natural interest, coping and struggle, and the abilities of a group of women in a place and time. However, what became very clear throughout the series of interviews and discussions was that of all the experiences in the lives of the women, nothing had impacted them as much as Katrina and their work with Women of the Storm. As one woman asserted:

> It was a time when there was extraordinary mourning that turned into rage that turned into action. That is what got everybody. It coalesced the community, it coalesced the region.

It was essentially what Avolio (2005) would describe as the trigger moment. This moment was when learning and experience met opportunity. As Powell (2007) writes, "What had been a deepening stream of ameliorative discontent before Katrina soon burst into a torrent of reformist anger after it" (p. 869). As described earlier, the horror of the event itself was one part of that trigger moment. An equally important component was the lack of leadership from traditional sources. This could do one of two things to a person, as one participant described it; either it "forces you to do something or it forces you to leave." The members of the Women of the Storm chose to stay and do something.

The women of Women of the Storm had lived through their crucible, as might be described by Bennis and Thomas (2002) and came out with a new self identity and awareness of themselves. The sleepless nights and gnawing feelings driven by the need "to do something" as several participants stated, drove the participants forward. It also drove forward many other individuals to assume leadership.

Citizen Leaders

The Women of the Storm were just one of the many organizations that emerged in the wake of Katrina and the absence of leadership. There were organizations that seemingly popped up over night. As one participant stated, "You were really on your own. The individuals that came back early on were really on their own to work through it. You were on, there was a lot, and again you had to really advocate on your own behalf, um, the neighborhood associations sprung up overnight". It was important to the participants of this study to discuss not only what the Women of the Storm accomplished but also the role of the many other organizations who helped save the city.

The citizens of New Orleans saw no response from the government and no one who was willing to help. So they took charge of their own lives. Powell (2007) describes the movement in this manner:

> Aspects of such take-charge politics are historically rooted in the good-
> government activism of Uptown New Orleans, as Pamela Tyler has shown.
> Within weeks of the storm, several high-status white women, retracing the
> steps of their Progressive forebears, overthrew entrenched patronage machines
> by organizing successful drives to consolidate the region's levee boards and

abolish the city's archaic tax assessment system. Yet the civic mobilization has been as much horizontal as vertical, energizing neighborhoods across lines of race and class. The city's middle class, black and white, by dint of greater resources, is admittedly better organized. But former public housing residents, many of them still stranded in the Diaspora, have launched lawsuits and have engaged in direct action to force the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) to reopen shuttered developments. In New Orleans East a community of Vietnamese refugees not only re-formed amazingly fast after Katrina, but halted the expansion of an encroaching landfill (p. 871).

The idea of working toward the common good, the good of all the citizens resonated throughout the interviews. Echoing these sentiments, one of the participants stated:

It has both pleased and surprised me that in these four years that so many groups have organized themselves. And are all working toward a common goal and the common good. Whether it is levees.org or Citizens for 1 that wanted to reform and did reform the assessor's offices or groups who have organized themselves for their own community. But all over the area, across south Louisiana, groups have formed to work together because it quickly became apparent that if you didn't take hold and do something about it, you may be waiting a long time. I have always since my student days as a political science major; I have always believed that the political power truly lies in the grass roots of this country. Or any country for that matter. And I had never seen it in action in New Orleans. It is interesting that there are a lot

of people involved in movements today who prior to August of 05 were busy

with their lives and their things and marching to Baton Rouge to stand on the

steps to demand that the legislature do something was just not something they

would do. Whether it be male or female. And it pleases me very much to

know people, some of them are friends, some I just observe from a far, people

who are doing things and perhaps we should have been doing things for a long

time and some of the things we find ourselves facing in the state in the city

and the communities maybe would not be as dire as they are now. Having

said that, it is better late than never. It is better for people to come to political

and civic activism at this time so that there is a sense of accomplishment that

flows throughout the community because of it.

Another participant stated it in this way:

If you look at any situation we as human beings have more in common than

that separate us. In this circumstance the circumstances were so compelling

that people didn't look to what divided them. They allowed themselves to be

moved by the common ground and the common good.

The role of women throughout the city and their role in the crisis was described by one of

the Women of the Storm in the context of the documentary film, *When the Levees Broke*,

directed by Spike Lee:

If you looked at Spike Lee's movie, there were people who organized their

blocks and there were people who were trapped here during the storm. It just

takes that one person to get people organized to clear the street, and to be able

to get out, and manage with no water, they were managing with no water and

no food and it is really and truly, there are some remarkable stories.

The experience brought people together. The disaster and the feelings of abandonment compelled them to act. As one participant recalled:

Katrina gave people a voice. And that can never be a bad thing. Because we

were never engaged in the system. People who never said a word never stood

up for anything now do it and that can never be bad. I don't necessarily agree

with most of them [laughter] but that can't be bad. And I think that is a

wonderful by product of Katrina is that people feel they have to have their

voice heard.

A participant highlighted the dedication and persistence of the groups:

If you are dealing in issues and you are focused on the good of the community

and there is no ulterior motive people are going to trust you and you can

connect with people you have never connected with before and you know that

and a sustained effort is what is quite remarkable and persistence of these

groups.

Pride in place and community was an important result of the disaster and the actions of citizen leaders. They gave others a sense that together they could fight and bring back the city. One of the participants reflected on this idea:

I am most proud of the people…the people who have stayed her and fought

for this place and in order to do that I believe you have to be a fighter, you

have to be a survivor" You also have to have faith that this city is going to

come back and recover. You have to believe. Despite all the issues that we

have that you hear about the comments that [former city official] made about

the race issues and the class issues. And the talk about people not wanting to

do things for themselves. Those comments, I totally couldn't understand.

The people here basically are what I am most proud of. We have been

through a lot. I hate to include myself as a WE. Because I didn't lose. Some

people lost everything and they still came back and they have rebuilt and they

continue to believe. This is their home and they are going to continue to fight

for it. And to me, that is significant. And to be a part of that despite all the

negative things that you hear, I am a part of the people now.

One participant found the emergence of citizen leadership somewhat inexplicable. Her
simple, common sense interpretation stated:

There is something about New Orleans after the storm. Your average

American just rose to the occasions. So many people came here for their

vacations to work on houses and gut houses and rebuild. For me personally

having been raised in the Catholic tradition, I always think that the biggest sin

you can commit isn't necessarily the wicked thing you sit around and think up

doing. It is the things you can do that you don't do. So when people wonder

why we did what we did and they say, "Why did you do all that stuff?" I say

"It is just because I could…so I did it!"

Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent crises that stemmed from the event highlighted an inadequate, ill prepared and at times, partisan to the extent of endangering lives, group of individuals in government positions. The stars, as one person put it, were "completely unaligned…wrong people at the wrong place and the absolute wrong time" (Field notes, 11/1/09). This oft repeated phrase among the participants of this study as well as those who served as sources for observations and field notes is often followed with a statement to the effect that it was the citizens who saved New Orleans.

Networking

As discussed in the previous section, the emergence of citizens leaders in the aftermath of the hurricane to address the crises facing the city was both unprecedented and by those from the city, unexpected. As one of the Women of the Storm mentioned, "the people in New Orleans lived like clans", families all within blocks, staying within both their social and economic circles. Katrina put a chink in that clannish armor, it forced citizens to work together in neighborhoods, extended communities, and across social and economic boundaries.

The idea of social networks and their role in the Katrina crisis emerged both within the interview setting with the Women of the Storm and through observations and discussion with others in the city. These discussions showed a shifting, complex interconnected web of people and communities that bubbled to the surface in the months following the storm and coming together to meet desperate, sometimes immediate, sometimes long term needs.

The first inkling of this surfaced during the researcher's initial encounter with a New Orleanian. Although the individual, a landscaper, did not specifically mention social capital, the meaning became clear when listening to his Katrina experience story:

> I didn't evacuate. I stayed through the storm. And afterward, it was like the Wild West, everybody who was left wandering the streets. At first we thought we had dodged the bullet. We had damage, you know, windows, roofs, the trees were in really bad shape, and everything looked bombed out. But that is a hurricane, we get them. Then word got out about the levees. Then, you know, everything just shut down. We had nothing, no food, no water, no electricity, and people were dying, they were drowning. I didn't really know people on my block; I didn't really even like the ones I did know to be honest. But the situation…we all started helping one another. We had to figure out where to get food, pick up the garbage, and patrol the neighborhood. We were all freaked out. We were on our own and all we had was each other. Our government, our (local level official) was in a coma. [official] had a breakdown, a total breakdown, I mean, you could see it. And [official] and [official] and FEMA, forget it. We were on our own. And it stayed that way for months. (Field notes, 10/31/09).

These efforts were vital and the networks on which they were built, played a key role in their success. Pyles and Lewis (2007) write:

> The power of grassroots organizing and the informal networks that people create cannot be underestimated in a disaster situation. Because formal

organizational networks may ignore the important assets that indigenous

volunteers bring, the inclusion of grassroots and informal organizations,

which are often led by and/or composed of women, can result in increased

citizen participation, particularly by those in isolated or marginalized

communities, in disaster response and recovery. (p 389)

Though it would be expected that one neighbor would help another during a time of crisis, one of the Women of the Storm still found the experience remarkable:

But let me say to you, you are dealing with the movers and shakers with your

work and the high visibility people, but I just want you to know that on every

level it was these people who were involved in the recovery. It really is the

most remarkable thing. Stories haven't been written on a lot of them or a lot

of the things that went on…you know neighbor to neighbor, family to family,

it was all of us. I mean, yes you hear about the Women of the Storm and we

are highly visible but the credit belongs to so many people in the city. I mean,

I just marvel at things that were done—men and women and children. Even

children. It is amazing.

Like the landscaper whose once disparate and disconnected neighborhood became a de facto organization responding to local needs during the crisis, there were elements of chance and circumstance in the Women of the Storm movement. The founder of the organization said that she:

…went to a lot of places and I kept, there was something gnawing at me and I

threw it out at the places we went but nobody took the bait and then at

Christmas my children had left and I thought something is just pulling on me

to pursue this idea. Everybody thinks it's great but nobody knows how to do

it.

The gnawing sensation that would not go away led her to make some phone calls and

those phone calls lead to more. In those calls she said "I want you to come here and I want you

to listen o this idea. It might be the shortest meeting you have ever attended but I want you to

come." One key element in bringing these women together was the trust and admiration with

which many of the women saw the founder (Pyles & Lewis, 2007). One of the women stated:

What she doesn't realize is that she made it happen and all the types of

women and the women that she gathered together were because of her. I think

that she had the connection to most everybody on that became a part of that.

During one of the interviews one of the women, who had not known the founder of the

group, although her husband did, told the story of how some of the women came to Women of

the Storm through connections such as hers:

I love to tell this story, one of our members, I was shocked to hear this, didn't

know Anne either. But a lot of those women that you saw at the table on

Monday [at the Women of the Storm board meeting] didn't know each other.

One lady said, "No I didn't know Anne." And when she got the call [to join

Women of the Storm] she did exactly what I did and went to her husband and

said "Do you know Anne?" And he said, "Yes! And she said "Well she wants

me to storm Congress." And he said "Oh yeah—that is great. Whatever she

is doing, she gets it done!"

The reputation for getting things done and trust were two elements that were sorely

missing in post Katrina New Orleans and they played an important role in moving the Women of

the Storm forward.

Another important part of the Women of the Storm was their ability to attract resources.

In fact, it was important to the women in their roles as leaders of other organizations that those

with resources were deeply involved and committed. It made recovery possible and it gave

meaning to the role of social capital during a time of crisis. As one woman described it:

And so in bringing the neighborhood back we needed the areas where there

were the higher social income levels to spur the recovery which they did cause

the resources were there. So out of the gate we needed our people who had

the resources to spur to start rebuilding their homes to show that the

community is viable because that was the first sign up of life coming back.

Another woman suggested that:

…because otherwise would anybody help you if you were well to do and you

were fine? The example is that you need them both and we continue to need

them both. So as the neighborhood has started to come back we are at about

82-83 percent recovered our area where higher income areas is pretty much all

back and you can look at the map and see the we subdivided in group a , b,

and c and they are coming back too.

The intricate web of community and the networks that had grown out of the Katrina crisis was described by one of the women as really showing that "the strong need the weak and the weak need the strong. And that diversity is a strength." This diversity among Women of the Storm and their work with other groups became a major strength for New Orleans:

You know that is another exciting thing you find when you talk about relationships and what has changed and been so meaningful. We now have groups who are very unlike ourselves who come to us to ask us to work with them. And that is so significant. They said you all can get this done and we want to get this done together and we built trust and that has been so positive…the trust that you build. And I find that you build trust by being who you really are and I think this was important after the storm.

The simple act of getting food and even opening restaurants again, depended on the creation of new networks. One woman, who was intimately involved in bringing back food and historic food businesses in the city, described the manner in which fresh food got into the city so restaurants could open again:

There was a business over on Magazine Street called the Savvy Gourmet, which was a cooking school and it just opened up before the storm…like the week before the storm. Well they didn't have any damage. They also didn't have any one to take cooking classes! They reopened as a restaurant which

they never intended to do. They had this big walk in cooler. One of the

things I did was, I would find the farmers who wanted to sell, I would get the

list of what they had, I would pass it on to any of the chefs who were open and

cooking, they would tell me what they wanted then the north shore farmers

would pick who was going to drive it in to the cooler at Savvy Gourmet and

the chefs would come pick it up. It was totally like a nineteenth century food

system because it all just ran on trust. There was an envelope for each one of

the farmers in the cash register. The chefs would just put the money in the

envelope and when the farmers would come back in they would pick up the

envelopes and that is how we were getting fresh food in the city.

Another woman noted, "I think this goes to show how small, not the footprint of our city

but the connections between people and how much responsibility each of us has assumed to

rebuild it bigger and better."

Additionally, one woman stated that she felt that she had done more, become more

involved and "went to a higher level because of the people I met. It is all social networking I

think." This statement seemed to resonate with the other Women of the Storm.

But I think also the journey to get back to where we want to be in the city is a

part its own reward. I think people who are here and are working, they don't

see immediately results. But they realize they are working on something that

is terribly important. And I think that for many of us this may be as important

if not the most important thing we have participated in a lifetime.

The feeling that the crisis had brought them closer together as a community, that "people cared a lot more" was echoed by others in the study:

> I do think that in some cases in very positive ways, the rebuilding of the city has helped cement relationships between groups in the white community and the African American community, also the Asian community because we do have a very important Asian community here.

Even those who were not originally from the city felt a sudden sense of belonging because of the new found tighter community:

> I now own up to being from New Orleans. And the part of the award that they showed was what I was most proud of being a New Orleanian. When I go places and talk to people it is more positive. When I am traveling in New York or even international travel and people ask where you are from and you say, "New Orleans" and they say "Oh, the place that flooded." No matter what--it is the place that flooded. Everyone knows the place was flooded. Yeah, I am proud. We have a lot of issues and we are working on them and unlike before people are talking about them and not hiding behind them so in that respect we are getting somewhere.

Creating new networks for those who lost them was the focus of one woman of the storm in the aftermath of Katrina. Her work in a New Orleans neighborhood and the successful reestablishment of that neighborhood in large part depended on the ability to create new social

networks and the places where they could be developed. She put the concept in perspective and concrete terms by describing her work post Katrina:

> We work throughout the region but we do have a focus on this neighborhood and others. One way I would describe our mission is to make this city a community a place where people want to be because we have built on the assets of the community… Homeownership provides stability in a community and also provides the ability for wealth creation for lower moderate income families. In this neighborhood we have a community center across the street and that has become a magnet after the storm. One of the dynamics after the storm was that places where people historically came together didn't exist anymore. In this neighborhood we had two major churches down the street. Our church being the more significant one. In fact it was celebrating its hundredth anniversary the night before Katrina made landfall and it has not reopened. They also had a senior center there. So people come back and you don't know where your neighbor is. Everything has been torn apart. How do you, what, we were looking at what role we would play to help stitch together the fabric of the community. And the neighborhood center was a place where people could come and relax and it is started with game nights. People came and played board games. But is has grown into civic engagement because we have a widespread poverty campaign. Volunteers will do door to door surveying, and asking about quality of life and they mapped all the vacant properties in the neighborhood and using what they knew, reached out to the owners of those vacant properties so they don't have to just sit there vacant.

And it is making a difference. We have a public market on Freret Street on

the weekends. So now the neighbors with our staff are out there selling

homes. And we have tracked down people and if they don't want the house so

we see if we can help find a buyer for them. We had our third annual

Halloween party and costume clinic. We had over four hundred kids that

came. So it is just about celebrating community. And what we find is by

creating this space people will say "Oh, you know, I like to do yoga…can I do

a yoga class at the center" So people volunteer to do a yoga class. We set up a

computer center because people didn't have computers or fax machines at all

you needed those telecommunications after the storm and so there was

somebody who had an idea of doing the computer lab and didn't have the

resources to do it and found our center and said oh they have the whole

infrastructure there all they need is me so now I can help people learn. I

always say there is just something magical that happens by just providing this

space and a little bit, we only have two staff people. But all this stuff happens

because we have provided this safe space and this welcoming space.

This new community network and spirit has helped to build and restore a neighborhood

that would likely have disappeared after Katrina without the efforts of a broader community.

The unexpected benefits to this effort were not just rebuilding the community but building a

deeper sense of history. She goes on to describe one of these unexpected outcomes:

We started having lunches for the seniors because they had no way of

connecting with each other. Out of that has grown this project with the

students at Loyola. They are collecting pictures of the neighborhood.

Nobody has ever done that. Well, there have been histories done of the

neighborhood and I always wanted photos of what it looked like in the 50s

and they put a call out for photos and as an incentive to residents we will scan

them and copy them and give them a DVD with the photos on them. We have

one neighbor who was a photographer during the civil rights era and when the

faculty went to his house they found a treasure trove of material. Now they

want to try to create a civil rights museum. This all happened because we had

an opening of the doors. We live in a world of infinite possibility if we just

create the space for those possibilities to happen. In fact we have this after

school program where the kids make crafts and then they sell them at our

market. There is one boy who has been in the program for three years and

used to have a lot of behavior problems and now he has changed. Just the

other day he said "Wow…this is a place of possibilities!"

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results of this study of the Women of the Storm. These results

were taken from the analysis of data including interviews, observations, and extant data. The

findings included a set a five primary themes that emerged from the study. These were: 1) the

impact and extent of Hurricane Katrina and the ensuing crises, 2) the vacuum of leadership after

Katrina and the ensuing consideration of what leadership means, 3) the role of WOS throughout

the Katrina crisis, 4) the experiences related to leadership development, 5) the emergence of

citizen leaders, and 6) networking among people and organizations. In the next chapter, a

discussion of these results and recommendations for further research will be explored.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the group of women that

comprise Women of the Storm (WOS) as related to their leadership role in responding to the

Katrina crisis. This study considered the perspectives of the members of WOS through the lens

of the influence of the Katrina crisis, their leadership learning experiences, and their actions in

the context of leadership during times of crisis. This chapter provides a discussion of the

findings of this study, conclusions, and recommendations for future research. A primary goal of

this discussion is to relate the results described in the previous chapter to the research literature

that formed the basis of this study and to consider implications for future research.

The research questions of this study focused on how events related to Hurricane Katrina

and life experiences influenced the participant's assumption of leadership and how the actions of

WOS are relevant in the context of leadership during times of crisis. The analysis of data

resulted in the emergence of six primary themes: 1) the impact and extent of Hurricane Katrina

and the ensuing crises, 2) the vacuum of leadership after Katrina and the ensuing consideration

of what leadership means, 3) the role of WOS throughout the Katrina crisis, 4) the experiences

related to leadership development, 5) the emergence of citizen leaders, and 6) networking among

people.

For the purposes of this chapter, these themes can be synthesized into four areas. First,

the experiences and perspectives of the participants offer a unique, first hand, framework for the

lessons to be learned about leadership during times of crisis. Second, these same experiences

begin to shed new light on the role of citizens and emergent organizations in times of crisis.

Third, the participant's reflections on experiences related to leadership development provide a

bridge between the ideas related to how leadership is learned and how these experiences become

meaningful during times of crisis. Finally, the ability of the participants as well as other citizens

groups to utilize existing and build new networks and connections demonstrates the value of

social capital in times of crisis.

Lessons to be learned about leadership during times of crisis.

One lesson that is learned by any researcher studying leadership, at any level, during the

Katrina crisis is that our understanding of leadership during times of crisis must expand to reflect

new realities. Boin and 't Hart (2003) write that crises are "extended periods of high threat, high

uncertainty, and high politics that disrupts wide range of social, political, and organizational

processes" (p. 544). There can be no doubt that Hurricane Katrina precipitated a series of crises

to the extent that the disruption and devastation is still visible four years later. They further state

that:

> Crisis and leadership are closely intertwined phenomena. People experience
>
> crises as episodes of threat and uncertainty, a grave predicament requiring
>
> urgent action. It is a natural inclination in such distress to look to leaders to
>
> "do some-thing." When crisis leadership results in reduced stress and a return
>
> to normality, people herald their "true leaders." Successful performance in
>
> times of collective stress turns leaders into statesmen. But when the crisis
>
> fails to dissipate and "normality" does not return leaders are obvious
>
> scapegoats. (p. 244)

Unfortunately for those in the wake of Katrina, there were no statesmen and no normality.

As discussed in previous chapters, leadership during times of crisis has received increasing attention in the last decade due to events such as the September 11 attacks, Hurricane Katrina, and the economic crisis of 2008. Yet this attention has not resulted in enhancing our understanding of leadership during times of crisis. It may be, as Boin and t'Hart (2003) describe that popular expectations of our leaders during times of crisis are simply beyond the reality of their capabilities.

In the film *Axe in the Attic*, one subject states:

> George Bush, in the White House said, 'Oh, I didn't know how bad it was'. Goddamn! You're the most powerful man in the world, how do you not know? You're killing people on seven continents…how do you not know what's going on in your own country?

Yet another subject in the film reflects, "Maybe our expectations are too high for leaders for what our government can do." Katrina certainly tested the ideas that government can solve all problems. It is possible that over time expectations of a hero who will save us during crisis has emerged and that is the expected norm. Grint (2007) states:

> In effect, we tend to focus on leadership under crisis conditions but ignore the other ninety-five percent of times when some form of stability prevails. Thus we often derive a picture of heroic leaders when it may well be that the more successful leader is the one who succeeded in avoiding a crisis. To

circumvent this problem perhaps we need to examine leadership in different

contexts to establish whether one of the reasons we appear to fail in

translating the 'lessons of leadership' is because the heroic leader is a

singularly inappropriate role model in many circumstances. (p. 233)

If it is true that our expectation for leadership must change, the question then becomes,

who the public should turn to in times of crisis, if not the traditional leaders? Or even more

relevant, what should we expect?

In discussing the experiences of the Women of the Storm, it became clear that there were

some basic expectations of leadership. These expectations came not from the position of

individuals who had asked for help after Katrina, but from those who acted as leaders during the

crisis. Serving as leaders and having helped to facilitate the rebuilding of their city in many

capacities gave the participants insight into what was possible and what should occur. These

were outlined in Chapter 4 and included planning, prevention, creativity, communication, action,

and collaboration. It is clear that the experiences of the participants should provide us with some

guidance for what our expectations should be. For example, several of the participants

highlighted the need for planning and strategy. As one stated:

Why didn't somebody come down here and say 'Here are our steps…A, B,C,

D…' You know? And sure you may have to go "D doesn't fit the rule but this

is what we need to get there. I mean there are models and there are plans out

there and I don't know why they didn't get here. And maybe we didn't have

the people in there who understood a global concept of crisis and emergency.

In essence, it is reasonable to expect that there will be a plan and a strategy as well as someone to implement it. This realization was not easily come to—it was the result of having experienced Katrina and reflected on what leadership means. The Women of the Storm as an organization felt so strongly that they should put their experiences to good use by formulating recommendations for the future. As seen in the testimony before the Democratic National Committee, the Women of the Storm proactively support crisis and disaster planning. This is a lesson about crisis leadership they learned well through Katrina. The testimony of Women of the Storm founder, Anne Milling, states:

> Today the Presidential campaign and the accompanying national party platforms offer another set of promising opportunities to draw attention to the issues raised by the aftermath of these hurricanes —among them emergency preparedness, disaster relief, infrastructure stability, and protection of coastal communities and our valuable wetlands and natural habitats. The concerns were laid bare by the catastrophe in New Orleans — and we speak today from personal experience. Each issue also resonates with every community across America. No place can claim immunity. Every American community and city is vulnerable, as recent floods in the Midwest and fires and earthquakes in California have reminded us. All citizens and elected leaders must understand that the *crisis du jour* could occur in your city today or tomorrow! (Women of the Storm, 2008).

This lesson is reiterated in the literature on Katrina as well. Godschalk, (2005) stated that Katrina "hammered home a simple but irrefutable lesson: Acting beforehand to mitigate natural hazard impacts is much more effective than picking up the pieces afterwards" (p. 58).

Weiner (2007) extends this idea by stating:

> What is most curious about perceptions of Katrina and its aftermath is that nothing that happened was—or should have been—very surprising. On close examination, the lessons said to be learned from Katrina turn out to be lessons that for the most part had already been learned—at least by some of those involved—well before the storm. Tragically, the knowledge was not well used. The risks and difficulties that the storm exposed were widely understood and publicized before the event, but these understandings were to an astonishing degree simply not acted upon before, during, or even after the disaster took place. The extraordinary accumulation of essentially foreseeable events and circumstances, followed by failure after failure, arrived in news bulletins and video clips in which those on the scene, and the general public, seemed to know much more about what was happening than many of those from whom decisive action was needed. (p. 258)

In addition to planning, the participants from the Women of the Storm recognized from experience, the value of another long discussed aspect of crisis leadership. That is, if planning and prevention fail, communication and action should at least be visible. The lesson to be learned here is that leaders should have been available, responsive, and communicative. As one participant stated,

What I can't understand, what I don't understand is this whole case of denial. People being in denial. But to just look at the people and look at what you saw on the TV and not respond. It just doesn't make any sense to me. I still don't understand the lack of response and I still try to put my hands around that.

As discussed in the results chapter, the participants often felt as if no one was there for them or communicating with them. As one put it, "there was no response."

Another lesson to be learned is that the crisis is not always the singular event such as the hurricane, the tornado, the earthquake. The crisis is the devastation those events place on society. The recognition that crises are long term events, as described by Boin and 't Hart (2003), underscores the need for long term response. As one participant stated, "You know the "emergency" you can kind of get through. People can get through the emergency. But then having to make those decisions after the event. That is the time when you need a leader." As Clarke (2006) writes:

But not just "someone." Three conditions must hold. The someone must be possessed of clear vision and expansive imagination, she must be in a position of considerable power so that resources can be directed as needed, and he must be sufficiently decisive to try to change the course of events so that people are valued over the mindsets and interests of bureaucracies. Those were the key failures in the governmental response to Katrina and they are by turns heart rending and infuriating.

A final and at times painful lesson to be learned is that there are times when the citizens must serve as leaders during a crisis. The lack of leadership in the aftermath of Katrina reminded one participant of the role of the citizens, "We did it, we have done it on our own. We have done it without help." After speaking with participants and other residents of New Orleans, the researcher could not help but see the pride, underscored with a still simmering rage among them all, that the citizens were the ones who saved the city. Powell (2007) writes, "The activism of ordinary people, many of them new to civic engagement, has epitomized post-Katrina politics. In New Orleans the sluggish economic recovery and slow governmental response have called forth a veritable "low-intensity citizens' revolution" (p. 871).

These hard won successes of the citizen's revolution should not deter our interest in having some expectations for leaders during times of crisis. As described by the participants, there are some basic expectations that should still hold true and lessons that can be learned when these expectations go unmet. Understanding these expectations and expanding our view of leadership to include emergent citizens groups may support leadership development. As we continue to experience crises on the local, regional, national, and global levels, our existing insufficient information about the complexities of leadership during modern crises are likely to confront researchers and leaders alike. Endeavoring to enhance our existing knowledge will likely shine light on ongoing efforts to address and understand leadership in times of crisis.

The role of citizen leadership during times of crisis.

This study sought to illuminate elements of leadership during times of crisis, specifically leadership that rises from within a citizen base and the impetus driving that rise to leadership. While the participants of the study were members of the Women of the Storm, it became clear to

the researcher that these individuals saw their efforts as part of that larger movement and the rise

of citizen leadership in the wake of Katrina. Throughout the interviews, the participants

emphasized all the groups that had taken charge and helped lead through the crisis. The role of

citizens in the response to the crises brought on by Katrina is, as one member of the Women of

the Storm suggested, is a story that has "yet to be fully told." Another stated:

> Stories haven't been written on a lot of them [citizens]. Or on a lot of the
>
> things that went on, you know, neighbor to neighbor, family to family, it was
>
> all of us. I mean, you here about the Women of the Storm and we are highly
>
> visible but the credit belongs to so many people in the city. I mean I just
>
> marvel at things that were done—men and women and children. Even
>
> children. It is amazing.

As Chamlee-Wright (2006) states, "Much of the analysis assessing the effectiveness of

government response to Katrina and its aftermath has been highly critical. And yet, the solutions

offered generally involve the expansion of government resources, increased centralization of

effort, and greater government oversight and control of private" (p. 33). While government,

particularly the Federal government, cannot meet every need, in most circumstances, especially

those as dire as Katrina, it is the only entity with the resources to respond fully. Clarke (2006)

recalls the early promises of the Federal government:

As the storm moved through on August 29, the director of FEMA, Michael Brown, said

that FEMA was ready. We've "… planned for this kind of disaster for many years because

we've always known about New Orleans' situation." President Bush promised that "I want the

folks there on our Gulf Coast to know that the federal government is prepared to help you when the storm passes."

Interestingly enough, Powell (2007) writes, "activist groups from outside the area moved with comparable first-responder speed to fill the void created by faltering government" (p. 872). In the case of Katrina, organizations focused on solving desperate needs emerged out of the houses and kitchens of those who remained or returned. From clearing out hundreds of thousands of tons of trash to building community health centers, citizens rose up to meet the demands of the crisis head on. Neighborhoods such as Broadmoor and Treme were slowly rebuilt house by house. Restaurants and historic places were restored and reestablished bring both jobs and citizens back to fill them. The citizen leadership movement was vast and each one filled a void left by the failure of leadership.

The case of Katrina demonstrates that it is possible that citizens in an organized capacity can be more creative, resourceful, and responsive than any government entity. This was true not just in the immediate response, but also after the first week. Powell (2007) continues:

> Neighborhood groups soon reconstituted themselves as planning committees.
> They set up resource centers to lend power saws and sanders; they created
> Web sites and electronic bulletin boards. Because the city's public works
> division was understaffed and overwhelmed, local citizens improvised street
> signs and filled their own potholes. And if the craters were too big, they
> turned them into aquatic theme parks, replete with toy boats and fake
> flamingos (p. 871).

Another example of this is the response from Common Ground Relief an organization that helped to rebuild neighborhoods after Katrina. Powell (2007) recalls:

> The Common Ground Collective (more popularly known as Common Ground Relief) formed in response to distress calls from the former Black Panther Malik Rahim. Within a matter of weeks Rahim and two organizers from Austin, Texas, saw their do-it-yourself start-up operation balloon from three to sixty activists, including self-conscious descendants of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) Wobblies. They recruited medics, carpenters, and computer technicians. They established medical clinics, distribution centers, and ad hoc house-gutting services. Returning residents to the devastated Ninth Ward were fed free breakfasts, provided free legal services, and given access to phone and Internet services. Common Ground Relief set out not merely to save a city, but to build alternative social structures—"without expecting the permission of the government, and often in defiance of it." (p. 873).

In the case of the Women of the Storm, they saw their role as one dealing with issues at the national level. They recognized that the funding that would be needed to bring the city back to some form of normalcy could only be found at that level. The group itself was a mix of the most active women in the city all of whom had led some other initiative. Powell (2007) describes the Women of the Storm and their counterparts across the city in this manner:

> Aspects of such take-charge politics are historically rooted in the good-government activism of Uptown New Orleans, as Pamela Tyler has shown.

Within weeks of the storm, several high-status white women, retracing the

steps of their Progressive forebears, overthrew entrenched patronage machines

by organizing successful drives to consolidate the region's levee boards and

abolish the city's archaic tax assessment system. Yet the civic mobilization

has been as much horizontal as vertical, energizing neighborhoods across lines

of race and class. The city's middle class, black and white, by dint of greater

resources, is admittedly better organized. But former public housing

residents, many of them still stranded in the Diaspora, have launched lawsuits

and have engaged in direct action to force the Housing Authority of New

Orleans (HANO) to reopen shuttered developments. In New Orleans East a

community of Vietnamese refugees not only re-formed amazingly fast after

Katrina, but halted the expansion of an encroaching landfill (p. 871).

It is interesting to note that in many of the conversations and interviews that the term lazy

or apathy was used to describe "New Orleans" political involvement. The communities and

neighborhoods were separate and unengaged in the broader issues that confronted the city. In

Mann's (2006) article, one individual who was interviewed states "New Orleans is a hotbed of

civic apathy…But Katrina changed all that" (p. 92). Both participants and those with whom the

researcher had off the record discussions described the historic political landscape to be less than

reputable and that prior to Katrina this was accepted as the "way it was." But, post Katrina,

citizens seemed to realize that apathy and acceptance were not simply external distant facts of

political life in the region, they were life threatening. The levee boards were corrupt

organizations and funding for support and rebuilding, much less advancing the region were kept

at bay by concerns about what would happen to the money once it arrived in Louisiana. It was as

if the citizens who were determined to hold the Army Corps accountable recognized in equal

measure that their own "acts" had to be clean as well. The passion for straightening out the

entire system was palpable no matter to whom the researcher spoke.

The concept of engaging citizens and citizen organizations that emerge during a crisis is

not a new one. Stallings and Quarantelli (1985) describe these organizations as emergent groups.

An emergent group:

> …can be thought of as private citizens who work together in pursuit of
>
> collective goals relevant to actual or potential disasters but whose organization
>
> has not yet become institutionalized. As such they are less than public
>
> bureaucracies but more than independently acting, isolated private persons
>
> converging on the same problem. Such groups are considered emergent in
>
> two respects: the relationships among the individuals pursuing the collective
>
> goals are new (the group has an internal structure that did not exist before) and
>
> the tasks being undertaken in pursuit of these goals are new for individuals so
>
> joined. In its purest form an emergent group has a new structure (i.e., social
>
> relations) and a new function (i.e., goals or tasks). Emergent citizen groups
>
> appear in both the emergency phase of disasters, as well as during the less
>
> crisis like preparedness and recovery phases (Stallings & Quarantelli, 1985, p.
>
> 94).

Stallings, R.A. & Quarantelli, E.L. (1985) wrote somewhat prophetically that:

> Public officials often do not take them into account in community emergency
>
> management planning and misunderstand both the reasons behind their

emergence and the roles they play in disaster-related community problems.

This is especially unfortunate because these kinds of emergent citizen groups

are likely to be even more prominent in the future than they are at present.

While this study focuses on a single organization, the Women of the Storm, in light of the emergence of so many citizens groups after Katrina, it is clear that this area of the crisis research literature may have an ideal scenario in which to investigate and explore the phenomenon of citizen based leadership in times of crisis. Pyles and Lewis (2007) write that:

We have learned that public and other formal organizations, including

unwieldy bureaucratic systems that are supposed to exist to serve people, can

sometimes fail us. Leaders of efforts, such as Women of the Storm, NORAA,

and public housing residents' councils, are examples of why valuing and

continuing to learn about grassroots organizing are critical. (p. 389)

This is equally true of the role of citizens groups in planning for disaster. Wachtendorf & Kendra (2006) write:

A strong and responsible government can provide necessary stability while

enabling improvisation and community-based participation. Government

must see planning as a process that, when done effectively, is less about

determining who is in charge than it is about working together at all levels

(public and private) toward a shared vision and a shared understanding of

what is needed.

An important role the Women of the Storm played was bringing national attention to the Katrina crisis. It began collaboration among levels of government and the citizenry that had not been present during the first six months of the Katrina crisis. During the visits to the region, Republicans and Democrats traveled together and worked together for the benefit of New Orleans. This was called, by one observer, a "rare moment of bipartisanship at a time when the two parties were barely speaking" (Field notes, 10/30/09). As one member of the Women of the Storm stated:

> It has been a learning experience for all of us as it relates to the political
>
> process, as it relates to advocacy and as it related to citizen involvement. So I
>
> think in that respect it has been a great learning experience. A great
>
> experience as it relates to the different classes and races here in New Orleans.
>
> The other thing is just that it allowed us to show a different aspect of New
>
> Orleans. When we traveled we were showing off our southern hospitality. In
>
> trying to bring people here it created a movement, not only from the Congress
>
> but also from the media and other people around the world. It gave you the
>
> opportunity to create something and be involved. I learned a lot and I can
>
> credit us for doing some great things because everyone was jumping on the
>
> band wagon.

Hurricane Katrina, and its aftermath, is considered the greatest disaster in American history. The physical devastation caused by both natural and human forces is often compared to that of the bombing of Hiroshima (Horne, 2008). This long lasting physical devastation was the outward symbol of a more devastating lack of leadership and response from those in power. As

stated previously, this lack of leadership was supplanted by leadership that emerged from the

citizenry. The successes of the emergent citizen leaders after Katrina including the Women of

the Storm was a consistent theme throughout the research study. The use of existing

connections, personal networks, and resources and developing new and important networks also

played a prominent role in their success. This theme is reflective of the concept of social capital.

Social capital.

Social capital can be seen as the "direct and indirect resources that are a by-product of

social networks and support systems amongst family, friends, or community members"

(Hawkins & Maurer, 2009, p.2). Within the context of Katrina, social capital surfaced as the key

to responding to the crisis as well as the recovery and rebuilding of New Orleans. This concept

is relevant to the questions guiding this study in that it was, in many cases, unknowingly, an

important part of the ability of the Women of the Storm to assume leadership. Many of the

participants learned the value of social capital during a crisis through their new connections

across communities and through their engagement with new and more powerful individuals at

the national level. Since many of the interviews circled this idea without articulating it in

academic terms, it is important to include a discussion of social capital within the context of their

experiences.

In many ways, the concept of social capital could be seen as an extension of the idea of

engaging citizens in crisis leadership and response. As Chamlee-Wright (2006) states:

> Storm victims may activate core networks to meet their immediate needs, but
>
> they are likely to deploy other strategies as well. Further, most of the network
>
> analysis on disaster situations focuses on individual or family survival, not the

problem of collective action in the face of catastrophic disaster and the long

term recovery of entire communities (p. 3).

For the Women of the Storm, activating core networks was the first step that led to

collective action in the face of the catastrophic disaster. As discussed in Chapter 4, Women of

the Storm began as an idea that emerged due to a lack of action on the part of traditional

leadership. There was no plan, just a few people around a table with an idea. But from that

moment on networking and social capital took hold. The first effort included what is called

bonding, which is a form of social capital that occurs among people of similar status and

interests (Hawkins & Maurer, 2009; Putnam, 2000).

However in order to assemble a representative group from the region, the next step

involved what is known as bridging. Bridging refers to developing networks among individuals

who are dissimilar (Hawkins & Maurer, 2009). The plan was intentional and it was speedily yet

well thought out. It was to identify a diverse group of women, with as one women put it, a

"track record of accomplishments" to join the group. The group that had convened around the

table in early January to hear an idea consisted of mainly upper class white women. But they felt

that this would not be enough. They wanted to cross community and racial lines, bring in all

ages of women from across the city and the region. Their goal to be the "face of the devastation"

required diversity, so the impact of the crisis could be seen in as many diverse faces as possible.

And it happened quickly. As one of the women put it, "I think once the you know person A,

person B, and person C, D and F came on it is sort of a domino effect. The idea is just to become

proactive." The group eventually included Vietnamese, Latina, and African American women

from different socioeconomic and age levels. As one of the women noted, most of the women

had never met each other prior to Women of the Storm. She said, "I met people from the city who have lived here as long as I have that I never would have known otherwise. Never would have crossed paths with. Maybe a 90 year old, 35 and 26 year olds, and people my age." Another woman stated that, "There were parts of town that I had never stepped foot in my entire life growing up here for no other reason than you tend to live in your own bubble you know."

Some elements of social capital relate to access to resources. The initial group that started Women of the Storm was able to gain access to resources. But as one woman, who was a member of Women of the Storm and who also started a citizen lead organization to deal with another crisis, pointed out access to resources in her group and Women of the Storm were different yet there were other elements for success as well:

> I'd also add that although our resources were completely different, both
> organizations were still able to accomplish big things. My organization
> started as an "everyone bring your own supplies" and then I personally
> purchased a base amount of supplies. Then ultimately we began receiving
> outside supply donations. Also those helping me were all in their late 30s and
> early 40s with small children whereas Women of the Storm was started by
> women in their 60s and a lifetimes worth of resources. The message I think is
> having great financial resources is certainly a plus but a person should not feel
> discouraged if they don't have financial backing to start up an effort,
> especially during a time of crisis. As there are so many people who may be
> out there who are willing to help in some way, shape, or form.

Bridging across communities opened doors for cooperation and for accomplishment. Turning long hoped for changes into reality. In describing how the crisis helped to bridge communities, a subject from the film *Axe in the Attic* stated, "When did black and whites start working together? After Katrina!"

The Vietnamese community was among the most active in responding to the crisis and rebuilding. They also worked with Women of the Storm and other organizations, the members of which they had never met before, to achieve closure to some of the most pressing crisis of the time. One participant who also leads another citizen's organization described the bonding and bridging activities of the Vietnamese community:

> Father Vien….he was very cultivated. He already went to all of the festivals and all of the gatherings, building the trust. So I think that just being able to communicate on a different level with people in different walks of life, in different ethnic groups, has changed everything.

The actions of this community are well known and respected within New Orleans. Father Vien personally negotiated with FEMA for trailers for his community eventually acquiring more than 100 which were placed at the church. His efforts were so successful that even when others were not able to acquire support, FEMA worked with Father Vien due to his and his community's determination to rebuild. One FEMA staff members commented on this saying, ""They sure want to pick themselves up by their bootstraps. There's no doubt about that" (Hamilton, 2005). Father Vien stated that it had been Katrina that caused this deep desire to rebuild. He said:

> Before Katrina, when we said homeland, we meant Vietnam. When my
>
> people say homeland now, they mean New Orleans. It's a radical shift in the
>
> people's mentality. It's a very pervasive sense. (Hamilton, 2005).

Vien also worked with organizations across the city, helping to support initiatives including the levee boards and assessors. He had policy papers and proposed legislation translated into Vietnamese so his constituents would know what they were voting for. One participant commented on the work that Father Vien had done with another organization she leads:

> Father Vien handed these [the translated texts] out at his church and every
>
> single person has voted with us when we went to Baton Rouge. The first day
>
> of the opening session one of the Vietnamese members spoke and we were
>
> lucky to have them. I think that just being able to communicate on a different
>
> level with people in different walks of life in different ethnic groups has been
>
> amazing.

The reason for the sudden budding of new relationships and bridging from one group to another was explained in several ways.

> It was true during the storm but I am talking about post storm, after the storm,
>
> trying to work with one another in that crisis and as one woman has done in
>
> her work with her neighborhood--she partnered with Harvard--that saved us, it
>
> is amazing to me. I think that this city…there is something so resilient, you
>
> know I keep using that word but it is true…and maybe if this happened in San

Antonio or somewhere it would be the same but I swear there is a lot of soul here.

The Women of the Storm went beyond both the bonding and bridging aspects of social capital. To achieve their goal, to bring members of Congress to New Orleans to see the devastation and then as a result obtain funding to support and jump start recovery, they needed to also move into linking. Linking is "the extent to which individuals build relationships with institutions and individuals who have relative power over them" (Hawkins & Maurer, 2009, p. 4). The ability to build relationships with members of Congress was particularly meaningful for the city. The visit to Washington, the tours given to Congressmen in New Orleans, and the ability to cross political lines and be non-partisan has helped to establish relationships and trust with people in power. As discussed earlier, the simple breakdown of government and services, the failure of those in positions of leadership spurred the development of these new social networks: But it also encouraged the development of a new understanding of the power of the community and the power of networking into new communities. One of the participants stated:

> You know it is so funny…everybody had the questions and wanting to know
> and there were a lot of connections that were happening that had not happened
> before the storm, and that's at least what I saw. I saw that complete
> breakdown of government, of assistance, and I saw the actions of people
> having to step in and do things themselves. And that for me was very
> humbling. But it was also very freeing. We don't need all of these other
> things we don't need these things….we don't need this stuff. We just need to
> have connections to people we just need to have our family and our friends

safe and as long as that happened near you and around you and I do know

people who lost family in the storm and that was a very traumatic thing to

happen to them but for the most part it brought people together. And meeting

people you wouldn't normally meet by chance. And making connections and

friendships you wouldn't normally.

In addition to recognizing their new power as it related to government, the participants

also found new found power by linking to other national groups. Bringing together the power of

other women's groups through linking also gave additional leverage to their efforts. In March of

2006 four national women's groups officially joined the ranks of Women of the Storm:

We are honored to be joined by these four highly-respected women's

organizations," said Women of the Storm Founder Anne Milling. "We like to

consider all of their members official 'Women of the Storm,' so our

membership just grew dramatically – from 130 to more than 300,000 (Women

of the Storm, 2006).

Hawkins and Maurer (2009) described social capital literature and its focus on disaster as

one which has concentrated on what might be considered those who have little social capital and

how it has served them negatively. This can been seen in the Katrina crisis, in the immediate

aftermath with the abandonment of thousands of people who had no means to evacuate the city,

who had no connections to other places where they could live, and no resources to recover. This

may in part explain the emergence of so many groups after the storm, there is a sense that no one

should be left behind again, that it should never happen again.

Within the context of Katrina, social capital surfaced as the key to the recovery and rebuilding of New Orleans. While Women of the Storm were actively engaged in either utilizing the social capital that they already possessed or building connections with others outside their traditional social boundaries, their key to success was in bringing both the bonding and bridging components of social capital to bear on links to new and powerful allies for New Orleans and the region. In addition, networking also took place with those of similar standing outside of the region. The relationships that came from social bonding lead to an influx of support from organizations outside New Orleans. This influence and bonding was used by a well known New Orleanian in the hospitality industry whom one of the Women of the Storm worked with:

> So my job was to get in touch with our board members and chef, who was at
> the time trying to find out where all of his 1500 employees were and were
> they safe, what happened with their homes, where they had ended up, could
> they work in other cities where we had restaurants, could they bring them
> together there, we were trying to pool all of our resources we established a
> disaster relief fund for all of our employees. And so he and I are working on
> that and saying we need to do something, he really wanted to do
> something….he is talking to his staff on a regular daily basis out of where he
> could be with his own family and where he evacuated to. He raised millions
> of dollars for his employees, he helped them relocate to different cities to take
> their families there to put kids in schools and get work in those particular
> restaurants and we had every chef in the country and wine makers and the
> hospitality industry saying what can we do, what can we do, what has
> happened to our great city of food and how can we help.

The role of individuals from outside of the region in the crisis response and recovery has been noted in previous sections of this paper. However, these bonds have not been bonds were not tentative or temporary bonds among groups. One of the members of the Women of the Storm recalled a group of volunteers:

> I saw a news report on New Year's Eve that a family in New Jersey, every year for the last four years, leaves home on New Year's Eve. It is a group of guys from a church. The same group comes down here and spends their New Year's Eve and holiday working in our communities. There is always a project for them. They work for a week or so and yet they have no vested interest in New Orleans. These people are not related to them. They have nothing to gain other than the knowledge they are helping to make a difference in somebody's life.

Many of the participants felt that the experience of Katrina changed not only their lives and their connections; it changed forever the connections and expectations among those who came to help. She stated:

> One of the things that came out of Katrina that was unprecedented was the number of volunteers that came down to New Orleans after the storm. That has just been overwhelming. And I would like to believe that each of those people that came down was transformed. So many people I have talked to said it was so much of a transformation for them as it was for those folks who were here when the levees broke. They went home and shared that experience with others. And so our Katrina experience ends up touching and moving

untold number of people around the country. And that played a role in people looking for something different in a President that lead to Obama's election. That is my theory.

Powell (2007) also recognized that the experience of Katrina, new linkages and the exposure of outsiders to the devastation would have a broader impact on society. He wrote:

> It is a realization that has started to dawn on many outside volunteers. You only have to spend a backbreaking week pulling drywall and mucking out houses to appreciate that altruism alone cannot restore electrical grids or fix broken pipes, let alone solve the myriad insurance and financial problems that currently stymie the post-Katrina recovery. You only have to strip one or two houses down to their studs before asking; shouldn't government be playing more of a hands-on role in the recovery? Those conversations have already started across backyard fences. It is more than likely that an entire generation of young activists will look back on their volunteer service in the Katrina zone as a life-changing experience, as a time that shaped their political values for years to come. Every generation has defining memories. For mine it was the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the civil rights movement, and the Vietnam War. For this generation it may turn out to be 9/11 and Katrina—and maybe more so Katrina, whose aftereffects may become more iconic, at least of the failure of government, than the toppling of the twin towers.

It is certain that social capital and human connections will continue growing and changing in the near future in New Orleans. The Women of the Storm continue to open up and share with new people and engage any one they can in their mission to restore the city and also the wetlands.

Leadership development experiences.

A primary focus of this study was exploring the experiences of how the members of the Women of the Storm learned to lead and to examine what life experiences had influenced their assumption of leadership during a time of crisis. As discussed earlier, understanding how individuals learn to lead and what experiences contribute to the motivation to lead is an issue that has been debated since the times of Aristotle (Grint, 2007). According to Grint (2007), Aristotle believed that leadership qualities and subsequently the wisdom required to lead came not in the form of years, but in the form of experience and learning. One of the assumptions related to this study was that there were unique experiences and perspectives within the participants who were members of the Women of the Storm that supported their assumption of a leadership position during a time of crisis. These experiences and perspectives may have been garnered from education, family, role models, or learning experiences or may have been driven by the dire circumstances surrounding Hurricane Katrina.

The results of the data analysis demonstrate that all the participants had a long history of community engagement, volunteering, and organizing. Several were presidents of school or library boards, deeply involved in charities from those related to education to those related to historic preservation. Giving back to the community was a common theme. This tended to come

from a family history or family influence and their relationship with their parents. One

participant said:

> I am sure my background and my education. And my parents. They believed
>
> in giving back to the community. It is just in your DNA. It doesn't matter if
>
> you are rich or poor you must give back. You must. Of course I went to a
>
> convent school so it is always giving to others. You live and breathe and you
>
> must give back. So that has always been a part of who I was so it seemed a
>
> natural thing to do.

In addition, several of the women identified role models. One reflected on how her role

model was the person who first helped to expand her interest in community service:

> I was vice president of this volunteer organization …this was 20 something
>
> years ago. And I made a phone call and just by luck one of the key projects
>
> they did in Israel had just been translated into English. So we adapted our
>
> own organizations project…it was a home instruction program for preschool
>
> youngsters. And in that time I met a women named *****, she is in her 80s
>
> now and was a school board member. She was the national treasurer of the
>
> League of Women Voters and she has been a huge role model and a mentor to
>
> me. And the things I have been involved in are because she connected me to
>
> them.

As Shamir and Eilam (2005) and Janson (2008) suggest role models are key to an

individual's leadership development. This can be true whether it is an individual known to the

person or an historical figure. One woman framed her personal role models in terms of how they have influenced how she works with community groups and others:

> I guess I would have to say Ronald Reagan and John Paul II. He was it for me. His optimism and his can do and it is amazing what can get done if no one cares about the credit no one cares who gets the credit. It is amazing what can get done in society. To me I think that is one of the biggest challenges in working with the community and building consensus is how to bring about change, what is the best way to bring about change, and for me and from where I come from it is building consensus. It is maybe working more slowly it is maybe not as dramatic but it is a better way to build change because it is long lasting and it is deep.

Although there were definite connections to the ideas of role models, community service, and other life experiences, it was clear from the interviews that all of these experiences served to provide the basis for their real leadership experience, that of a leader during the Katrina crisis. It was what Avolio (2005) describes as a trigger moment. Critical mass may provide for a delayed trigger event or tipping point when learning meets awareness of learning (Janson, 2008). It is unclear if there was an awareness of learning. Still immersed in recovery, there may not have been enough time to reflect on how the participants got from point A to point B. Katrina and the lack of leadership that characterized its aftermath was the convergence of an urgent need, ability, and the willingness to act and the opportunity to do so. One of the participants stated, "there was so much need that there was always an opportunity for someone who was willing to step up."

This also may provide some explanation of why individuals react in times of crisis. Crisis situations could potentially provide the trigger that spawns sudden awareness of knowledge and capabilities, as well as providing an opportunity to act.

As discussed, the participants of this study were Women of the Storm and helped to lead that effort, but they also served in leadership capacities after the storm in many venues. They had, as one participant recalled, "Pulled up their sleeves and worked." This was far beyond their experiences of volunteering and community service. It is possible that not enough time had passed for them to thoroughly reflect on their leadership development. Many of the participants spoke was if they were still deeply engaged in crisis recovery mode. They felt there was still so much work to be done. As Campanella (2006) writes "It is clear that a modern city is virtually indestructible. At the same time there is no question that a catastrophe will profoundly alter a city's fortunes and fate; and therein lies the more compelling matter of resilience and recovery. Indeed it is possible for a city to be reconstructed even heroically, without fully recovering" (p. 142). New Orleans has yet, for many of the Women of the Storm, to fully recover.

Conclusions

This study sought to explore the experiences of members of the Women of the Storm within the context of leadership during times of crisis. The research questions guiding this exploration focused on the role of Hurricane Katrina in influencing and motivating the participants to lead; the life experiences that may have influenced their assumption of a leadership role; and, how the actions of the Women of the Storm are relevant in the context of leadership during times of crisis. The following conclusions regarding these questions are provided in this section.

As described earlier, Hurricane Katrina was the trigger event that influenced the participants to take a leadership role. The devastation of the city that they loved and the near destruction of their culture and society had driven them to act. More than just the hurricane and the flooding of the city, it was the void of leadership that influenced the participants most strongly. As described earlier, one of the participants said:

> Had government pumped and worked as it should and had the city worked
>
> with the state and the feds and it all worked as it should a good tight knit plan,
>
> well oiled and greased, these groups probably wouldn't have sprung up and
>
> the reason we emerged was because of that void and we filled that void.

Feelings of abandonment and rage spurred on by this void in leadership were the key contributor to their motivation to lead. This does not take away from the desire to help those who suffered and their community, which was also an influence. But the degree to which leadership failed the people of the region was matched only by the degree to which it motivated average citizens to take up a leadership role during the crisis.

The life experiences of the participants had an influence in several ways. First, the participants had a strong connection to community and to being engaged in efforts to improve their community. They all discussed a history of community involvement either through volunteering or community organizing. This commitment to community was an important component in their drive to assume leadership and help restore their region. Second, the participants also spoke about the importance of role models in their leadership efforts after Katrina. Individuals in their personal lives as well as those they admired from afar had influenced them and instilled in them a "can do" spirit. In addition, several of the participants

saw the founder of the Women of the Storm as a role model. She had inspired them to take the lead by her own actions. They learned to lead by observing her actions and as their actions mirrored hers, they began to identify themselves as leaders. This in many ways supports the ideas of Janson (2008), Kempster (2006), and Shamir and Eilam (2005) which look at both the significance of role models in leadership development and how observation can support development. Finally, from mothers to presidents, all of the women had some influence in their leadership development they could attribute to role models.

The last question under exploration focused on how the actions of the Women of the Storm were relevant in the context of crisis leadership. The members of the Women of the Storm as individuals had taken on leadership roles in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As described earlier, from leading the cleanup of 250,000 tons of garbage and debris covering the city after the flood waters receded to tackling head on the mental health crisis that gripped the city after the initial event, these women stepped into the breach and worked through complex and time sensitive crisis, small and large. As members of the Women of the Storm, they stormed Capitol Hill and brought back with them not only attention and support from Congress, but hope for the people of the city. In doing so, they gained significant knowledge and experience that can be helpful in understanding leadership during times of crisis. As part of their efforts they recognized the importance of working in a non-partisan manner, focusing on the issues and crossing party lines to gain consensus. This knowledge has been put to good use. The organization has formulated recommendations related to crises and emergency management and worked with both parties in the national government to move these ideas forward.

Recommendations

James and Wooten (2008) state that "learning and development are at the root of what we consider to be crisis leadership" (p. 355). Yet they also recognize that there is a dearth of research on just how this type of leadership ability develops. Bennis and Thomas (2002) would likely describe the Katrina crisis as a crucible, an experience critical and necessary for leaders to develop.

There are several areas within the research literature that remain largely unexplored. This study was an effort to explore two of these areas: leadership during times of crisis and experiences related to leadership development and the areas where they might converge. It was undertaken within the context of the Katrina crisis, the worst disaster in American history to date. It is not possible to generalize outside of this context, since there are few events that are of equal measure. But as this paragraph is being written, the people of Haiti have just suffered a devastating crisis of their own. In speaking with several of the participants since the earthquake in Haiti, the provided what they believed to be some of the lessons learned from their own experience. These lessons provide an excellent starting point for future research.

One of the assumptions guiding this research was that the Women of the Storm filled a part of that vacuum in the leadership following Hurricane Katrina by serving in a role that would have traditionally been filled by political or officially elected or appointed individuals. In contrast to this in a recent phone conversation, a study participant described what she felt as an important benefit from the experience of Katrina. She said, "I believe that what we are seeing with Haiti is the result of Katrina. They governments reacted immediately." She felt there was a forceful and immediate presence in Haiti that had Katrina not happened would likely not be

there. There was what was missing with Katrina: immediate action, communication, and collaboration. Whether this sentiment will hold true in the weeks to come is unknown. There was, with this participant, the perception that movement was taking place and problems were being addressed. She noted that no one asks for perfection in a crisis and that all things cannot be controlled. However, the blame, arguments, and paralysis that characterized the leadership throughout the Katrina crisis could and should never be repeated. Another participant could clearly feel the trauma of the Haitian people. It seemed to have brought back memories of what happened after Katrina. She remarked that there were not enough "images of what the people are going through in Haiti." With Katrina, there were images everywhere, yet no action. As the immediate crisis in Haiti dissipates, there is an opportunity to extend crisis leadership research by examining in a qualitative sense what, essentially, went right. Contrasting this with the Katrina crisis would provide more insight into crisis leadership, the role of traditional leaders, and if any, citizens groups that emerge. This research could potentially extend our knowledge of this often discussed yet rarely studied phenomenon.

In addition, crises are often described as opportunities for action and change. In the Katrina context and the comments of the participants of this study, the Katrina crisis is often referred to in this manner. Even in the coverage of the earthquake in Haiti, within days the term "silver lining" was openly discussed among television reporters and their interview subjects. Rebuilding the country, brining attention to the plight of Haiti was "the silver lining" in the crisis. Interestingly, Bennis and Thomas (2002) describe their concept of crucibles as "both an opportunity and a test. It is a defining moment that unleashes abilities, forces crucial choices, and sharpens focus" (p. 16). The convergence of these two ideas provides an opportunity to more fully examine how crises provide a crucible and opportunity to learn to lead.

Finally, the role of citizen leaders and the importance of social capital in the response and recovery of New Orleans throughout the Katrina crisis provide a window within which to view more closely how such forces can be applied with crisis leadership and management settings. Chamlee-Wright (2006), asserts that such a scenario would be a step forward in integrating community networks and social capital in disaster planning and policy. It will be meaningful to explore more fully how these organizations can perform and be called on in future crises as well as examine the sustainability of groups that arise during crises.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the group of women that comprise Women of the Storm (WOS) as related to their leadership role in responding to the Katrina crisis. This study considered the perspectives of the members of WOS through the lens of the influence of the Katrina crisis, their leadership learning experiences, and their actions in the context of leadership during times of crisis. The data gathered provided both in depth details about the crisis itself as well as insight into the experiences of the participants. These experiences contributed to a greater understanding of what leadership means during a time of crisis, specifically the Katrina crisis as well as how average citizens rose to the challenge of leadership when it was sorely lacking from traditional leaders. It also offered a glimpse into the experiences that contributed to the leadership development among the participants. From family influences to a history of community service, the participant's experiences charted a path toward their leadership role in the Women of the Storm as well as other organizations that helped move New Orleans from crisis to recovery. They also developed and fostered new social networks and built solid social capital, should, as one participant said, "God forbid this should ever happen again."

Campanella (2006) writes, "Cities are more than the sum of their buildings. They are also thick concatenations of social and cultural matter, and it is often this that endows a place with its defining essence and identity" (p.142). New Orleans, even more so after Katrina, has for the participants of this study a defining essence and identity. When asked why she fought so hard for a city that was eighty percent under water, one participant responded, "I think that this city…there is something so resilient, you know I keep using that word but it is true. I swear there is a lot of soul here." The effects of the crises brought on by Katrina, especially those that solid and effective leadership could have ameliorated, were drawn on the psyche of the citizens like battle scars. These scars were healed, as one participant said, by being involved with groups like Women of the Storm. She said simply, "It healed my soul." That healing took place through action, the actions of average citizens, including the members of the Women of the Storm.

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APPENDIX

Schedule of Interview Questions

Revised Schedule of Interview Questions
August 5, 2009

Title of Project: A Case Study in Citizen Leadership During Crisis: The Experiences of the Women of the Storm

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Note: Primary questions are numbered. Potential probes are lettered a, b, c, etc and are to be used if needed.

Date of Interview: _____

1. Tell me about yourself?
    a. Were you born in New Orleans and have you lived here all your life?
    b. Where did you go to school?
    c. How many people are in your family?

2. Where do you currently work and how long have you been in your present position?
    a. How did you decide to become a _____?
    b. Did you have any role models who helped you along the way?

3. How many people are in your organization?
    a. Was it different before Katrina?
    b. What challenges have you encountered during and since Katrina?

4. Have you been to leadership training or participated in leadership seminars?

5. Have you had other learning experiences that supported you?
    a. What did you learn from these experiences?

6. How would you define the role of a leader during a crisis?
    a. How would you describe the formal leadership during the Katrina crisis?

7. How would you describe your experiences as they relate to leadership during a crisis?

8. How would you describe your style of leadership?
    a. Is there someone you emulate?

9. What factors have been influential in shaping your crisis leadership actions?
    a. What caused you to act?

10. How did you become involved in the group Women of the Storm?
    a. How do you feel WOS served as leaders during the crisis?
    b. As women, did they play a particular role or would it have been the same if men had organized and lead in this way.

11. Was communication important and if so in what way?
    a. Who did you communicate most often with?
    b. How did you coordinate with others?

12. Was there a need to collaborate with other organizations?
    a. Was this facilitated by officials or did this simply emerge as part of your overall actions?

13. What did you do to stay focused and maintain control?
    a. There was a lot of stress, what did you do to cope with it?
    b. Was there some experience that helped you?

14. What was the key to making decisions?
    a. How did you make these decisions?

15. What changes have occurred since then?

       a. In the city and in the organization.
       b. Have your fellow citizens changed?

16. Have you reflected on the process as it relates to leadership?
       a. What would you say to those who were in formal leadership positions at that time?
17. What have you learned?
       a. Will these be lessons you can use in the future?
       b. How would you suggest others learn to lead in a crisis?
       c. In your opinion what would be most effective?

18. Is there anything you can think of that would have made crisis different?

19. What actions will you take to prepare for a crisis in the future?

20. What is your perspective and advice to others in a similar situation?

VITA

Maurie Caitlin Kelly

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Director of Informatics   2007-Present

Penn State Institutes of Energy and the Environment

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Director of PASDA & Senior Research Faculty   1997-Present

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