

## Chapter 5: The Results

**“Heritage Common has a high percentage Hispanics and should be supervised by someone who is biligual and bicultural that can identify the needs of the majority of the residents. In order for the conditions between residents and management to improve, the management should make decisions that show that they cared about resident opinions when important decisions are made. We could have other benefits from federal funds that could possibly be obtained for our good.” – resident, age 49**

I have come about the results of this research in a somewhat unorthodox way. Traditionally, the survey results answer the primary research question, but in this particular research project the objectives of the survey are slightly different. The main purpose of the survey in answering the research question was to see if this research method did indeed contribute to a mobilization of the residents of Heritage Common into community action. This is not to say that the survey did not play a more traditional role in this project. In fact, the frequencies of the variables informed questions I had about general demographics of the resident population there as well as helped shed light on the social services that are most needed and wanted by the residents. In this section, I will report on the results of both “roles” of the survey in the following manner: 1.0 demographics of the survey sample, 2.) how the can contribute to mobilizing the Heritage Common residents, and 3.) themes generated from the survey that are potential organizing rallying points. It is important to note that the respondents to the survey

represented 64% of the total heads of household at Heritage Common. The assumption will be made throughout the analysis that this majority is representative of the Heritage Common population as a whole.

**Demographics of Heritage Common:**

The population of Heritage Common generally reflects the population of Lawrence as a whole in terms of ethnicity. The majority of the residents are of Latino origin, with 48% being of Dominican background and 33% being of Puerto Rican background.

They are generally much more proficient in Spanish than in English, with 50% of the residents saying that they use Spanish more than English outside the home. The data show that the population at Heritage Common is generally fairly well educated, although a 53% majority expressed interest in continuing their education through General Education Diploma (GED) classes and/or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

**Table 7.1 : Educational Levels at Heritage Common**

Less than High School	20%
High School	36%
Some College	21%
College	17%

Source: Heritage Common Survey, 2000

Heritage Common is comprised of fairly young families. Fifty-three percent of the respondents surveyed were under the age of 45, and 60% of the households have either one or two children living in them. Seventy-five percent of the respondents were women, and of the 60% of respondents that are married, a full 72% reported living with their spouse. The majority of the respondents are employed in the service sector (43%), and there is 6.7% unemployment, higher than the national average of 4.1%. (Source:

Bureau of Labor Statistics) Of the people who were willing to disclose their income (n=69), 73% of them earned under \$20,000 per year, 23% earned between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per year, and only 4% earned above \$30,000 per year.

### **Results of the Research - The Process of Moving People to Action:**

In order to answer the main research question, it is necessary to gauge the effect that the act of conducting a survey of this community had on the efforts for community organizing. The chronology of the community organizing coincided with the advent of the research. In the first meeting with residents for the pilot survey, it was evident that there was more on their minds than simple taking an opinion poll on the services that were most needed. It can be noted that there are two explanations for the conversations with residents to sway from social services to the need for a residents' group. First, many of the residents who agreed to do the pilot survey were involved in the previous tenants' group, and had not been in a room together discussing the needs at Heritage Common since the last group broke up. Talking about a new residents' group was a natural continuation of some of the conversations that were held six years before. The fact that this pilot survey was bringing this group of people together re-started those conversations. The second reason is that Mr. Morales, as the Resident Services Coordinator, was seeing that there was a need to re-start tenant involvement in the concerns of the community. In identifying this need with residents, he found that the process of conducting a survey and getting outside input from a researcher was the perfect opportunity to bring the community organizing issues to the forefront of tenants' minds once again. In any case, the initial pilot survey meeting was the first time in years

that people seriously began thinking of organizing again, and this time they saw the capacity to do so with outside resources available to them.

From that initial group of people at the pilot survey meeting and the conversations that that meeting generated, an official Tenants' Committee was formed. So far, there have been three meetings where the agenda was filled with deciding on which issues are most important to Heritage Common. One of the main topics of discussion was how to organize the rest of the residents to support community improvement. Out of the many concerns of the residents, the group chose four they feel are the most pressing. They are: 1.) enforcement of the curfew especially during the summer months, 2.) the lack of lighting in various sectors of the property and the security concerns that come with it, 3.) improved maintenance of the apartments (specifically starting with smaller expenses such as painting and replacing the carpeting), and 4.) residential services. In terms of services, they also chose four that they felt would be most beneficial to all the residents. They are: 1.) homeownership workshops, 2.) workshops that deal with family and youth issues such as substance abuse, domestic abuse and crime prevention, 3.) recreational activities for parents, children and elderly residents (including field trips off the property to various outdoor recreational areas) and 4.) GED and ESL classes.

Besides the issues that were identified, the group has begun to strategize on how to approach management about the concerns that they have about the various administrations that have been in charge at Heritage Common in the last few years. The members of the Committee generated a list of questions that they plan to bring before the management at the next resident/management meeting scheduled for May 18, 2000.

These questions include:

1. What is the future if Heritage Common? Will Heritage be in the hands of another company or the city? Will it become a project?
2. Management has not shown it cares much about maintenance. When are they going to take responsibility for emergencies?
3. What do they plan to do with the “new administration”? They always start well and then begin to falter.
4. What are the protections/benefits that residents have in case of emergencies (i.e. floods, water pipes breaking, ceilings falling in, etc.)
5. How much time does it take to make changes inside the apartments? Can management please give us concrete policies on these changes?
6. When will they insulate the apartments? ( insulate meaning storm windows and insulation be installed in each apartment)
7. Is the management sure that they will live up to the promises they have made to residents about plans for changes? Management needs to do things when they say they will.
8. Why are things not working, for example street lights around the property, like they promised in the beginning? Promises have not been kept.
9. Why are the rules constantly changing and nothing gets done?
10. Will this administration agree to work with the Tenants’ Committee?
11. Why have some parts of the lease agreements been ignored by the administration?
12. Where are the statements for the shares? We should get a statement every month without having to ask for one.

The Tenants’ Committee sees these questions as concrete starting points for conversations with the management about issues that have concerned the residents there for many years but have never been addressed in a group setting. The group is serious about beginning a positive, open relationship with the management in which difficult issues can be talked about and addressed in a timely manner.

This research effort has brought a group of residents together and started them thinking about the benefits of community action. They have begun to think strategically about what their roles can be in the processes to improve their community. While many residents including many who now are on the Tenants’ Committee were very disappointed by the results of some of past interactions between management and

resident groups<sup>36</sup>, they have begun to change their attitudes about what it means to be involved in the community. Although some are not completely convinced yet about the influence a strong tenants group can exert on the administration, they are more and more encouraged by the strong attendance at the meetings and the conversations that are taking place.

### **Themes - Possibilities for Community Organizing:**

The survey process resulted in people beginning conversations and moving to action, but the actual data from the survey process has yielded several themes that can serve as starting points for further organizing. These themes were revealed by the answers given to the multiple-choice questions, the open-ended questions, and the focus groups. Their recurrence in many parts of the research process led to the conclusion that these issues were of particular importance to the residents. They are especially salient in the organizing process because identifying the important issues is one of the first steps in planning strategy for the organizing effort.<sup>37</sup>

#### *1.) Security*

Security at Heritage Common was a concern for many residents, and it was often a topic of conversation among them. Although in both the qualitative as well as the quantitative results, the majority of the residents reacted positively to security, there were still areas of concern. Twenty-two percent of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the question “Is Heritage Common safe?” In addition, out of the 30 people who brought up the security issue in the open-ended portion of the survey, 34%

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<sup>36</sup> Since the dissolution of the last tenants’ group, there have been very few interactions between residents and management. The few times that tenants have met with management they have felt that management

felt that security was not good. Out of the same 30 people, 13% felt that the lack of lighting was a problem on the property. The large number of respondents who have concerns about security suggests that there is the potential to organized around this issue.

The focus groups revealed that there are specific ideas for improving the security at Heritage Common. Among them were shifting the hours of the security guards in order for them to be available all through the night and into the early hours of the morning and looking at different models of community policing. The latter idea was especially salient in light of a community organizing focus.

**Table 7.2: Perceptions of Safety by Selected Groups**

Variable	Indicator of Variable	Feel Safe	Do Not Feel Safe	P-value
SP_LIVE	# of single heads of household	73.6%	26.3%	p=.563
CHILD_AGE	# of parents with teenage children	70.3%	29.6%	p=.660
HC_YRS**	# of people living at Heritage Common for more than 5 years	76.2%	23.8%	(p-value unavailable)
ALL RESIDENTS**	# of people that responded to the survey	78%	22%	(p-value unavailable)

Source: Heritage Common Survey, 2000

\*\* Note: Chi-squares were not performed on these variables. Percentages come from frequency tables.

When the security question was looked at by sub-groups of residents (i.e. spouse not present, parents of teenagers, and people with 5 or more years of tenure), there was no significant differences between these identified groups. This suggests that none of these three groups stand out as being more amenable than the overall population to organizing around security.

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did not listen to their complaints. Residents say that evidence for this is that management did not follow through with the plans and agreements they made with the residents.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Murnane and Levy, 1996.

## 2.) *Maintenance and Property Management*

A major concern for many of the residents was maintenance and property management. Although this issue was not explicitly mentioned in the survey, many of the residents took the opportunity in the open-ended questions to state their frustrations with the quality of maintenance and property management at Heritage Common. This theme is the one with the most potential for becoming an issue that the community organizes around. People are very passionate about management's seemingly lax attitude towards residents' complaints about this issue. The residents want a resolution to this problem. In fact, several were explicit about stating their dislike for the way things are being managed at this time. Some of their comments include:

- "What I least like about H.C. are the many promises that are made each time a new management comes in and they never live up to them." (8 years at Heritage Common)
- "I want the management to have a meeting with all of the residents. They don't pay attention, they don't clean the stairways, where I live there is a light that is burned out. I have spoken with the office, and they haven't done anything. The service is bad." (8 years at Heritage Common)
- "I have many complaints about the maintenance of the apartments. I have been asking for a long time to have the doorbell and kitchen light fixed, and the windows fixed because it is too cold. The heat has cost me a lot because I have to keep it on high to heat up my room." (9 years at Heritage Common)
- There is a "lack of communication between the residents and the management." (5 years at Heritage Common)
- "Heritage Common has a high percentage of Hispanics and should be supervised by someone who is biligual and bicultural that can identify the needs of the majority of the residents. In order for the conditions between residents and management to improve, the management should make decisions that show that they cared about resident opinions when important decisions are made." (5 years at Heritage Common)

Of the 42% of people who raised maintenance and property management as an issue, 81% had a negative opinion of maintenance and property management at the property.

In all fairness to the management, there were some who expressed gratitude for the efforts that management has made on behalf of the residents. Some of the positive feedback included:

- “They clean and fix up the area and provide activities for the children.” (5 years at Heritage Common)
- “They keep the grounds clean. Right now I am satisfied with all that they do in the community.” (2 years at Heritage Common)
- “Now when you call for them to come fix something in the apartment, if they don’t come the same day, they will come the following day. I think that they have improved a lot in this respect.” (4 years at Heritage Common)
- “I like everything so far...They do good work.” (1/2 year at Heritage Common)
- “They are available at all times and never complain about helping out.” (1 year at Heritage Common)

Fifty-two percent of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the living conditions at Heritage Common. In addition, 72% of the respondents expressed a desire to remain living at Heritage Common.

It is important to note that those residents quoted as unsatisfied with maintenance and management had lived at Heritage Common for an average of 5 years, and those who were satisfied averaged 2.5 years at Heritage Common. Out of these responses chosen at random and based solely on levels of satisfaction, length of tenure played a role.

A specific issue related to property management that came up in the survey responses, the focus groups and in the empirical data was parking. There is a concern over the lack of enforcement of parking rules at the property. In the open-ended section of the survey, 10% of the responses commented negatively on this issue. It was also an issue discussed in the focus groups and in various informal conversations held with the

residents. Although this may not be major theme to organize around in and of itself<sup>38</sup>, it is an important subsection of the maintenance and property management theme. It is currently being addressed by the Heritage Common staff. They are now requiring that all cars have a parking sticker, and those cars not parked in their assigned spaces are subject to towing.

Responses to the open-ended questions and focus group discussions show that there is potential for organizing residents around improving maintenance and property management at Heritage Common. Specific issues in these areas that could be primary focal points are: 1.) improving communication between the residents and management (i.e. meetings between management and the Tenants' Committee), 2.) improving maintenance and the speed of response to residents' requests, and 3.) enforcing parking rules and regulations.

### *3.) Resident Services*

Of the many social services that the respondents could voice their opinions on in the survey, there were several that they found to be most relevant to their needs. They were the after school and summer programs for the children, recreational activities for all residents, GED and ESL classes, homeownership workshops, and community health and safety workshops.

It should be noted that the respondents highly approved of having all of the social services that were on the survey available at Heritage Common. Seventy-six percent of the residents and 70% of the respondents approved of increased educational activities and recreational activities, respectively. Twenty percent of the respondents in the open-ended

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<sup>38</sup> The reasons for this could be that 1.) not everyone owns and car and 2.) some residents may be

section of the survey mentioned the after school and summer programs and Rafael Morales (the person in charge of the programs) specifically, and said that they were pleased with the programs and their coordinator.

The GED and ESL classes were also highly approved of, with 53% of the residents saying that would like to see these classes offered at Heritage Common. In addition, the focus groups strongly support holding these classes in the community room at Heritage. The case for GED and ESL classes was made repeatedly at the Tenants' Committee meetings, and in conversation with residents, many expressed the desire to take these classes but found it difficult to go to them if they were off site and at night.

The idea of having homeownership workshops at Heritage Common was also very popular among respondents. Young families especially expressed their interest in the opportunity of owning their own home. Over all, 71% of the respondents said they would be interested in these workshops.

The Tenants' Committee proposed grouping a number of services together as "community health and safety workshops." The services included in this group are substance abuse prevention, preventative health education, domestic abuse prevention, and crime prevention education. The Tenants' Committee felt very strongly that if these were presented as stand-alone workshops, people would not come to them. The stigma of drug, alcohol and domestic abuse would be too great. Also, it is worthy to note that they added domestic abuse to the list. There have been several cases of domestic abuse at Heritage Common in the last few years that have been quite severe.

Taken individually, however, the support for these services were as follows:

<b>Social Service</b>	<b>Approve (%)</b>
Crime Prevention Education	76%
Preventative Health Education	64%
Substance Abuse Prevention	61%

Source: Heritage Common Survey, 2000 (Note: n=89)

Raising funding for and implementing the community health and safety workshops as well as GED/ ESL classes and homeownership workshops are issues in which residents are very interested. For that reason, these are good issues around which to organize.

### **Themes - Possibilities for Organizing Targeted Sub-Groups of Residents:**

When running chi-square tests on the resident services theme by sub-groups of residents, there are several tests that indicate that certain sub-groups are more amenable to be organized around a particular issue than the Heritage Common population as a whole. The following are tables of sub-groups and the social service topics in which significant differences were found that point to a targeted organizing strategy ( $p < .10$ ) above and beyond organizing all residents around community health and safety workshops.

**Table 7.3: Support for Recreational Activities**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Indicator of Variable</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Do Not Support</b>	<b>P-value</b>
CHILD_AGE	# of parents with children under 13	24/39 (61.5%)	6/17 (35.3%)	<b>p=.070</b>
	# of parents with teenage children	15/39 (38.5%)	11/17 (64.7%)	

Source: Heritage Common Survey, 2000

\*Not all respondents answered this question, so the number answering yes/no is in the numerator and the total number that answered is in the denominator.

**Table 7.5: Support for Educational Activities**

Variable	Indicator of Variable	Support*	Do Not Support*	P-value
CHILD_AGE	# of parents with children under 13	26/43 (60.5%)	4/13 (30.8%)	<b>p=.060</b>
	# of parents with teenage children	17/43 (39.5%)	9/13 (69.2%)	

Source: Heritage Common Survey, 2000

\*Not all respondents answered this question, so the number answering yes/no is in the numerator and the total number that answered is in the denominator.

The two preceding tables show that parents with younger children are significantly more likely (at the  $p=.10$  level) to support recreational and educational activities. This suggests that this sub-group of parents may be more amenable to being organized to advocate for these services from TCB.

**Table 7.6: Support for Homeownership Workshops**

Variable	Indicator of Variable	Support*	Do Not Support*	P-value
CHILD_AGE	# of parents with children under 13	27/40 (67.5%)	3/16 (18.7%)	<b>p=.001</b>
	# of parents with teenage children	13/40 (32.5%)	13/16 (81.3%)	

Source: Heritage Common Survey, 2000

\*Not all respondents answered this question, so the number answering yes/no is in the numerator and the total number that answered is in the denominator.

In this particular case, it was evident that parents with teenaged children are less likely to be interested in a homeownership workshop. When looking at the results of parents with younger children, they are significantly more likely to want to participate in a homeownership workshop (see Table 7.6). The results show that young parents are more interested than other groups in this service. Therefore, the Tenants' Committee may want to consider targeting these residents to be involved in an organizing effort to get homeownership workshops offered at Heritage Common.

**Table 7.7: Support for GED and ESL Classes**

SP_LIVE	# of heads of household living <i>without</i> a spouse present or singles (with and without children)	4/26 (15.4%)	8/22 (36.4%)	<b>p=.094</b>
	# of heads of household living <i>with</i> spouse (with and without children)	22/26 (84.6%)	14/22 (63.6%)	

Source: Heritage Common Survey, 2000

\* Not all respondents answered this question, so the number answering yes/no is in the numerator and the total number that answered is in the denominator.

This data show that people who have been at Heritage Common longer feel that GED and ESL classes are more important than single persons or parents of teenage children. Based on participant observation, those who have been at Heritage Common tend to be older than the recent arrivals, and they tend to have lower levels of English proficiency. Given the interest in community participation among this group, they seem to be a good target for organizing efforts.

This chapter highlights three types of results that align with this paper's attempt to use research methods to organize housing communities: 1) demographics from the survey, 2) ways in which the survey process can mobilize the Heritage Common residents, and 3) running statistical tests on the survey to identify key issues and needs around which to organize the community.

The survey respondents represented 64% of the total Heritage Common population. The demographics show that respondents were mostly women, with children, and fairly well educated. The majority was low-income, and the respondents reflected a higher unemployment rate than the national average.

The survey was proven to be an effective way to mobilize community members; especially in the pilot stage. It allowed people the opportunity to discuss concerns where

they did not have a chance before. Out of the discussions about the services at Heritage Common came concerns about issues such as maintenance that were important to the residents. In turn, out of these discussions sprung the idea of forming a Tenants' Committee which is now officially recognized by the management.

Statistical tests show three major areas around which to organize: security, maintenance and management, and resident services. These tests also suggest subgroups to target for more effective organizing. Specifically, where it was originally the intention to analyze the opinions of parents with teenagers, a more significant group to examine was parents of children under 13.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

**“I want to live at Heritage Common because it is the best place.”- resident, age 42**

### **Role of the Researcher and Lessons Learned:**

This case study has focused on research taking place in a low-income, minority community context and is a commentary on the roles and responsibilities of researchers in their interactions with communities. Specifically, it explores the process of community organizing and the impact that researchers and their tools have on it. The research process has brought to light several important issues.

This study has shown that there are certain variables that need to come together in order for community and organizational change to occur: 1.) There needs to be a community that has “latent” issues hiding just under the surface of general consciousness that the “researcher/research tool” can bring to the surface. In other words, people in the community may want change and be thinking that there should be change but do not have the support networks, the knowledge or infrastructure to begin the process of change. 2.) As in most research cases, the researcher needs to establish trust with the community, and *in addition*, be committed to being a resource person for the interests of the community.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> This model is known as the participatory action research model (PAR.) See Brown (1983), Cancian and Armstead (1992), and Freire (1982). For an alternative view of using PAR for consciousness raising, see Patai (1991).

That is to say that if the community is interested in mobilizing around housing issues when the research is on health issues, the researcher needs to use his/her position as a contact point to a larger network of academic as well as community sources to help the community achieve their goals for change. A researcher may not be an expert in the area that the community needs assistance with, but he/she is in a position to help by virtue of the ties he/she has to larger networks (i.e. academic institutions, community organizations and funders.)

This does not necessarily mean that the focus of the researcher or research needs to change, but that he/she is willing to refer the community to the people and organizations that can help. This not only helps the community, but also keeps the researcher in good standing and helps with trust-building between him/her and the community. Being willing to be this type of resource for the community also reciprocates that *favor* that the community is doing for the researcher in helping him/her conduct their study. Too often, the act of conducting research is seen as a service to the community because the research could ultimately have some positive impact on the community in some way. But, in the short run, the community is offering their time, personal information, and access to their social networks in order for the researcher's project to be successful.

The research at Heritage Common is a concrete example of the potential impact that a person with weak ties in the community can have on a community voicing their opinions.<sup>40</sup> People in these communities often place high expectations on the results of the research. They expect change to happen whether or not it was implied or expressed.

This impact reinforces the idea of conducting responsible research, and has implications for researchers going into these communities in the future. There have been many cases in communities around the country and the world where researchers promise positive change when in fact they are unsure as to whether they will be able to deliver on these promises. In explaining the purpose of the research, it is often easier to establish confidence in the project if the community feels that their contribution will somehow benefit them in the long run. As a result, it is tempting for a researcher to promise things that may or may not be possible to follow through on.

Unkept promises have made many communities jaded to the research efforts of new researchers. If it is the case, as I have hypothesized, that researchers and their activities can bring about community action, then there is even more reason to encourage trust between communities and academics. Fostering a positive perception of the research process and its links to the betterment of the communities that are the participants will benefit research in the future, and encourage communities to see research more as a mutually beneficial exercise.

At Heritage Common, people saw me as an outsider who offered to them an opportunity to change the status quo. The terms of successful research in this community relied upon a reciprocal relationship between the respondents and me.<sup>41</sup> I originally entered the community to conduct a survey. I saw that the residents needed assistance in organizing, they had hinted at whether I would be interested in helping them organize, so

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<sup>40</sup> Weak ties refers to a relationship between people or groups of people that has not been tested by time nor experiences. See Granovetter (1973).

<sup>41</sup> It has been argued that the mere act of listening to the participants stories affirms them and validates them in the process, and that this is intrinsically valuable. However, this research process is often still unequal in the exchange between researcher and participant. (Patai, 1991) This is where trying to return

I assumed the role of organizer. They gave me answers to the questions that I was asking and, in turn, I gave them the opportunity to voice their opinions and became a source of information on how to go through the process of organizing. My responsibilities were not only in conducting quality academic research, but also in responding to the needs of the community in terms of access to community organizing resources and knowledge.

Although the research at Heritage Common is a case study, its findings can be useful in examining how similar communities may react to the researcher. It specifically shows how relatively small, low-income, minority communities can mobilize towards community action using the influence of the researcher and his/her tools as catalysts. This study not only speaks to the researcher's side of things, but also to the research's effects on the community.<sup>42</sup> As stated above, research can bring an opportunity to begin dialogue about issues that are important to the residents of a community. It is also an opportunity for community empowerment.

Research provides a starting point for the discussions and facilitates the process of identifying the most pressing issues. Although the residents felt that social service needs, which were the original focus, are important, my internship and fieldwork in the community suggested that there were even more pressing issues.

One of these issues was the lack of resident representation in the daily operations of the property. They wanted to form a community group that was formally recognized by the staff at TCB. I became interested in how they had seized the opportunity to use me as a resource in helping them mobilize community support for their efforts. In this

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something of value (i.e. opportunities to voice their opinions and links to resources in the larger community) to the participant in order to foster a more reciprocal relationship is of importance.

<sup>42</sup> See Cancian, 1992.

particular case, the research shifted focus to the process of community organizing, but it could have easily stayed focused on social services. I could have simply continued with the original purpose while helping the residents get leads on where to go to get help in the organizing process. The important point here is that the researcher needs to realize that he/she is often the only link to outside resources. If the community's future wellbeing is indeed at the heart of research, then this is a responsibility that a conscientious researcher is willing to take.

A point that is particular to my research at Heritage Common is the idea of my place as a "borderlands person."<sup>43</sup> During the course of my research, I spoke with community organizer Marshall Ganz, and he suggested that my role in this process exemplified the idea of the "cultural borderlands." Cultural borderlands refers to people who straddle various cultural lines. They can bring new assets and resources to the community they are working in as well as take new assets and resources into the other networks in which they operate. Generally, this concept applies to people who live their lives crossing between two different ethnic groups. In the Heritage Common case, I went in as a student from MIT, an intern with TCB, and a Latina who was familiar with the language and culture of the majority of the residents. The different roles that I assumed (e.g. intern, researcher and organizer) made a difference in the way that I was perceived by the community and the types of relationships I was able to forge with them. I came in as an intern and organizer, but as a result of the research process, the role of organizer was pressed upon me. This helped transform the research from simply a needs

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<sup>43</sup> For a thorough examination of "Borderland Theory" see Michaelsen and Johnson, 1997.

assessment to a study of the process of organizing and the researcher's role in this process.

### **The Tenants' Committee Using the Results of the Survey:**

The results of the survey were useful in that they helped inform the Tenants' Committee members which issues the majority of their neighbors felt were important. From its inception, the committee was adamant about being responsive to the needs of their community. This was especially important since the lack of response to needs on the part of management was one of the community's biggest complaints. At the committee's meetings, I shared the results of the survey with them. They in turn, chose the four most pressing needs (homeownership workshops, GED/ESL classes, family recreational activities, and community health and safety workshops.) The rationale for choosing these being that they would not only reflect the needs of their neighbors but also be deliverable to them in a reasonable amount of time. With the support of the majority of the community's opinion behind them, the committee feels that the success in acquiring these services and getting community participation will be high.

The Tenants' Committee feels that getting word out into the community about the possibility of bringing these services will get people interested in the activities being offered. By inciting people to begin taking part in activities offered at the community room, they feel that it increases the chances that people will begin to take notice and talk to each other about other issues affecting the community as a whole on a daily basis. They feel that by using individuals' interests in particular social services, the Tenants' Committee can further their efforts to organize people around certain issues.

Because I was interested in potential differences between groups (e.g. people living without a spouse, parents of teenagers, and people with the longest tenure at Heritage Common), I compared sub-group responses to the survey questions. Where the literature and my experience suggested that there might be a difference, I used chi-square analysis to compare responses of two different groups.<sup>44</sup> The data analysis hinted that there seems to be consensus on most of the issues brought out by the survey. For example, people living without their spouse tended to feel similarly to the rest of the community on educational activities; parents of teens and the rest of the community both felt that crime education was not necessarily a priority; and people living at Heritage more than 5 years tended to feel that job training programs were just as important as those who have lived there less than 5 years. For the most part, it can be said that the community is in agreement about which services are important. However, the survey showed that there are specific issues that are particularly relevant to certain segments of the community, and are therefore, issues that these specific groups can rally around.

The survey results identified issues that were significant to the three sub-groups, namely GED/ESL classes, homeownership workshops, and interest in community social service needs in general.

### ***Length of Tenure/GED and ESL:***

Approaching this group about pushing for this service at Heritage Common could serve as an organizing starting point. People with a longer length of tenure were particularly interested in GED/ESL classes. Participant observation data suggest that this group tends to be older than the other groups and tends to have the least proficiency in

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<sup>44</sup> The purpose of chi-square analysis is to show if there is a statistically significant difference between the

English. This is due primarily to the fact that they are generally the first generation in the U.S. from their native country.

Apart from the GED/ESL classes specifically, people with the longest length of tenure at Heritage Common tended to be more interested in supporting the social services in general. This group would be a good target of community organizing at Heritage. Their longer tenure points to two possibilities: 1.) their general satisfaction with living at Heritage Common, and that they have a vested interest in improving the community, and 2.) that they are the people with the least ability to move due to their financial situation. In this case, the participant observation points to the former explanation. Throughout the course of informal conversations, many residents voiced the opinion that Heritage Common is one of the best places to live in Lawrence, and that many of their friends and acquaintances would want the opportunity to move to Heritage Common. This is also supported by the fact that there is a waiting list of 1,000 people waiting for an opening for an apartment in Heritage Common.

All this is not to say that those who have not been there as long are not as interested in seeing the community move forward. What it does suggest is that those who have been there longer know what works and what does not work at Heritage Common, and therefore, their opinions can be counted as based on experience and reliable.

***Parents of Children Under 13/ Homeownership Workshops:***

In the statistical tests, there was a significant difference between parents of children under 13 and parents of teenaged children in terms of their interest in homeownership. The parents of younger children were more interested in the

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responses of two groups.

homeownership workshops and were also less likely to want to stay at Heritage Common in the long run than were the parents of teenagers. This particular service was of interest to the majority of the residents, but it was of particular interest to this sub-group.

A possible explanation for this is that younger parents still would like to raise their children in a single family home rather than an apartment development, while parents with teenagers may feel that their children will be moving on to their own homes in a matter of a few years. Parents of teenagers may see the homeownership option as something that may not fit their lifestyles in the near future. The numbers show that there is no significant difference in terms of educational level or income between parents with younger children and parents of teenagers.

Given the interest in homeownership by parents of young children, a strategy for organizing to offer this service could be to target as many of these parents as possible, and enlist them in getting their friends and neighbors regardless of the age of their children to participate. It may be that participation in the workshops could change the point of view of people that did not show an interest in this service in the survey.

***People Living without Their Spouse (with and without children) or Single People:***

As a rule in the results, this group did not show very strong support for any of the services. Their support for the services were out numbered by the support that people with longer tenure and parents of teenagers showed in all of the cases. People living without their spouse/single people also showed less support for services than the rest of the respondents in general.

This difference is interesting in and of itself in that the Tenants' Committee can target these people as a group to try to get more involved in the community. This may

mean that the committee has to strategize about which issues that most directly affect this sub-group, or finding intersections between their interests and the interests of the rest of the respondents. The survey was useful in this case to the extent that it showed that people living without their spouse or who are single are the group that tends to participate the least in the community. This is useful information in the organizing context. This group is a potential target for organizing campaigns. Outreach to this group can be conducted in order to try to increase their participation in the community.<sup>45</sup>

The information obtained from the survey is useful not only for examining the differences between sub-groups and leading to organizing strategies for these groups, but also in seeing what benefits the survey process in general has for both the researcher and the community.

### **Benefits for the Researcher and the Community:**

Below are rationales for viewing the survey process and its results as beneficial for both the researcher and the community.

#### ⇒ Researcher

- achieves the purpose of gathering the information
- is both quantitative and qualitative – allows for testing variables in a variety of ways while examining the issues at a deeper level
- forges strong ties if the trust is developed and fostered which in turn can benefit future research

#### ⇒ Community

- gets dialogue flowing
- facilitates brainstorming on issues affecting the community
- involves residents in implementation of ideas
- shows the importance of “strength in numbers” - having a common voice

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 7 for specific results for this group.

## **Recommendations:**

As a researcher, I learned several important lessons about conducting participatory research in a community such as Heritage Common. The first lesson was to be aware of my position as a researcher. Although residents were friendly, welcoming and accepting of me, I was never wholly a part of their group; I was always an outsider. This may seem a trivial point, or one which is obvious, but it is important to always keep this in mind as a researcher because after many interactions with a group of people it is easy to begin to think that one is a natural part of the group. I had to be attentive to their perceptions of me as an outsider and of their expectations of me as someone who has links to networks outside their community that may serve as resources.

The work that I did also reinforced the importance of not being patronizing in my approach to the residents. I was learning from their experiences; they are the best resources for learning about their community and their needs. Once again, they were helping me as much as I was helping them.

This brings me to lesson number two: listen to the participants in your research. Are they trying to use you as a resource with something that may not be a part of the research? I learned that to encourage positive relationships, I had to make the effort to help them with their community organizing goals. Had I been reticent to get involved with their move to organize a committee, then they may have seen me as a self-serving researcher that did not have the best interests of the community at heart.

Along these lines, I learned that I had to be open and willing to contact people that may be able to further help achieve the goals that the community was vocalizing. This points to the reciprocal relationship between the researcher and his/her subjects in

the community. I did this by identifying resources in Lawrence that would be willing to give the Tenants' Committee technical assistance in order to ensure the sustainability and success of the group after my research is finished. I feel that this is one of the most important lessons. If a group that is new to the organizing process is left without support from "experts", it can leave them vulnerable to the frustrations of having to discover for themselves the steps to take in order to achieve their goals. These frustrations can be avoided if there is a guiding hand there for them.

The fourth point is to be transparent (to the extent that your research allows) about the ultimate goals of your research, and do not make promises that are ambiguous or hard to keep. Often, the goals of research are to provide information so that steps can then be taken to try to solve some of the issues that are found significant in the research. There often will not be immediate/obvious results from a research effort. Translating to the community the timeframe of the process from study through to action is important. Dealing with the expectations that both the community and the researcher have of the results of the research can also be difficult. There are certain things that a researcher sees as essential to the improvement of the community that others outside the community may not see as essential. A researcher may say something will take place when in fact in depth discussions about that issue may not have taken place, or circumstances along the way may have eliminated that possibility. An example of this would be that a community researcher may see a daycare program as an important service to a community with many single parents, but the funders or people that make the program feasible may not feel that that is the best use of their funds and time. Although this may be the case, it is important

to note that a researcher is not always in the position to be an expert in resource allocation.

Yet another lesson learned was to be encouraging when community members make strides, even if they are small, towards “empowerment”. Many of the people in these types of communities have seen their shares of disappointments. Those may have been personal or caused by outside forces. Whatever the roots of the disappointments, they often have led to cynicism about the possibility for positive change in the community. In the case of Heritage Common, there had been a Tenants’ Committee in the past that did good work, but then became splintered and was eventually disbanded. This was a disappointment to many residents and they were cynical about the possibilities for organizing a new group. Given this history, when interest in restarting a committee was voiced, it was important to give as much support to this effort in order to regain a sense of community that had been lost with the breakup of the last committee. People are slowly starting to regain that sense of community that they had once had.

These lessons learned in the course of the research at Heritage Common are not new in the literature on participatory research and roles and responsibilities of researchers.<sup>46</sup> Although they are not new, these lessons reiterate, and therefore, validate what has been discovered in the past and further inform researchers going into communities to gather information for their studies in the future.

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<sup>46</sup> Involving the participants in the research and using their participation in the study as an agent for social change has been written about extensively. The settings for these studies range from elderly communities in Harlem to low-income communities in Brazil and from theoretical writings to writings on the application of these theories. For further reading see (Freidenberg, 1991), (Patai, 1991), (Freire, 1982) and (Stull and Schensul, 1988).

### **Limitations of the Research at Heritage Common:**

There are a few things, that had they been done differently, may have improved the study. First, the validity and reliability of the data may have been enhanced if the question on social services was clearer. As it is now, it is evident that some of the respondents may have misread the question. Although this may be the case, it is impossible to say definitively since the surveys were anonymous, and therefore, eliminate the possibility of follow-up with individuals. An example of a potential misreading is that several young people responded to that question saying that they would use elderly services while several elderly residents answered saying that they would use pre-natal care. In this case, another pilot group of respondents would have been useful. The first pilot group tested the language of the survey. It helped clarify some of the confusing questions. Their results could have pointed to the misreading of the question. The second pilot group could have tested a revised version of the question to see if it was still being misread.

In terms of the more technical aspect of the study, the research method may have been more sound had the survey been administered uniformly. As it was, some people were given the survey to fill out and others had someone else read them the questions, get the responses and fill out the survey. Finally, in terms of bringing more closure to the project, it would have helped to have the meeting between residents and TCB a lot earlier. It was originally scheduled for mid-March, but due to scheduling difficulties with participants in the meeting, it has been scheduled for the end of May.

Although there were these limitations, I feel that this research project was a success. The community was helpful in helping me get the information that I needed,

and I hope that I was able to help in getting them organized enough to achieve the goals that they have set for themselves. The interpersonal relationships that I have forged with some members of the community have been wonderful and will continue despite the “official” end to my responsibilities both as an intern for TCB and as a student at MIT.