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The Social Construction of Loss and Grief: Experiences of Coastal Louisiana Residents

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The Social Construction of Loss and Grief: Experiences of Coastal Louisiana Residents

A Thesis

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by

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This thesis would not be possible if it were not for the residents of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana. Deepest thanks to all of my respondents for sharing your stories both joyful and painful; furthermore, I truly appreciate the honor in trusting me with your hopes and dreams. To all of my professors and advisors, especially my first professor of Death and Dying and my thesis advisor, who taught me the tools and relayed the knowledge that provided me a means to voice this subject, thank you. And, Henri you inspire me everyday of my life, I am so grateful for your unwavering support.

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Abstract

The overall goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of disaster-stricken communities using the experiences of the community of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana, and examining their narratives for an understanding of loss. This thesis uses symbolic interactionism, and draws from existing literature in psychology, thanatology, and sociology to develop the understanding of loss and grief. The strategy of inquiry employed for this qualitative study is ethnography, and the study uses fifteen in-depth interviews. The analysis addresses the pre-Katrina reality of residents, broken into the six dimensions (Community, Work, Family, Identity, Faith in the Systems, and Future), then compared to their post-Katrina realties to discover loss. This thesis relates the loss, and the associated grief, to existing literature on loss and grief. It also examines how the loss of these aspects of life begins to affect their future and the ultimate decision of whether to return home or remain relocated.

Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION

The worst-case scenario for Coastal Louisiana happened as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Louisiana loses coastland every year due to erosion, and past research warned of the potential for a storm to wreak catastrophic damage on Louisiana, primarily the coastline (Laska, Wooddell, Hagelman, Gramlings, and Farris, 2004). Due to Hurricane Katrina, much of Coastal Louisiana suffered tremendous damages, and community members of these impacted areas experienced a number of different losses. The motivation for this thesis is to better understand what happened to the affected individuals and how they responded to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. The overall goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of disaster-stricken communities using the experiences of the community of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana, and examining their narratives for an understanding of loss.

The foundation of this thesis is a social psychological examination. This study takes into account the individuals interviewed in the social contexts of pre- and post-Katrina environments by using symbolic interactionism which is "the freedom of individuals to construct their own reality as well as to potentially reconstruct that which has been inherited" (Fulton and Bendiksen 1994:7). Breakdown of reality, such as with a hurricane, prompts the affected society to redefine their reality. Blumer's (2003) work, which coined the term symbolic interactionism, examines human behavior and the meaning people attach to elements of their lives. Included in these meanings are the definitions society uses for each other.

Goffman (1959) claims, that people act and react along similar means and constraints universally, and it is through the collective understanding that they have a unified image of reality. Through symbolic interactionism, the definitions it provides, one can understand reality

and the rules and regulations created within. One such aspect of society governed by social constraints is loss and grief. Brabant (1996) defines grief as, "…the human response to loss" (p. 5).

Every society determines a hierarchy of importance to loss; for example, in many cultures the loss of family members is the most significant loss to experience. One's expression to a loss is culturally dependent, for instance, some cultures celebrate after the loss of a family member while others mourn. DeSpelder and Strickland (1999) state, "Studies indicated that human response to loss is not genetically determined but culturally learned" (p. 86). Individuals and families experience loss and grief as the result of a number of events, but the expression of each may be different from family to family depending on cultural norms. "Culture affects more than simply the expression of grief. It influences patterns of attachment, defining the meaning of different losses, influencing who one mourns as well as the intensity of that grief" (Doka and Martin 2002:339). The main research question guiding this study is: What are the understandings that members of a small coastal community have about loss and grief due to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath?

A common expression associated with loss and grief is mourning. Brabant (1996) notes mourning as the psychological and emotional acknowledgement of a loss as well as following the appropriate behaviors society dictates as the expression of grief. There are predetermined ideas of how an individual or group should respond to a loss. These ideas are socially constructed. Mourning is the public display of grief, and Brabant (1996) notes Durkheim's idea that mourning is a "duty imposed by groups." The behaviors one demonstrates, such as attending memorial services and wearing black, are shaped by culturally appropriate patterns.

Member's in society recognizes those patterns as the face one projects as a mourning individual (DeSpelder and Strickland 1999; Brabant 1996).

Loss is expressed when one experiences disconnect from an important element in life; however, personal and societal understandings do not always correlate. Society defines legitimate loss contributing to traditional loss. Examples of society recognizing a legitimate loss are employers providing time off from work or schools not penalizing students for attending memorial services. Unrecognized loss is when one experiences the feelings of loss and society does not acknowledge this separation as legitimate, meaning that the loss is not traditional to that group. In some cultures, only the death of an immediate family member is considered a legitimate loss (Doka 2002). Fowlkes (1990) states that it is not only the society in which we live that dictates grieving norms, but that norms are centrally constructed in the family. For the individual, the rules and regulations taught within the family unit provide a model to follow as they grow into adulthood.

In this study, Boothville-Venice, Louisiana, residents share experiences from the effects of Katrina, both during and after the storm. Their reactions to those experiences are the primary focus of this study. Furthermore, their dealings with the events, both personally and socially, are considered. Through in-depth interviews, community residents tell their story, and from their accounts emerge their socially constructed dimensions of loss.

Questions raised and answered in this analysis are: How do members of small coastal communities frame their world pre- and post-Katrina? How is loss socially constructed by residents of Boothville-Venice following Hurricane Katrina? Furthermore, how is grief from loss expressed? What dimensions of loss emerge from the overall experience of loss? How are

the understandings of loss and grief experienced by community members in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina reflected in the existing literature on loss and grief?

The majority of research on loss explains grief as a personally private, emotional response; thanatology is the field which examines these responses (Fowlkes 1990). Bridging the psychological and the sociological areas are symbolic interactionism and the social construction of loss and grief. The concepts on loss and grief, and how they are socially created and maintained, assist in shaping the overall ethnographic approach used to tell the stories of how Hurricane Katrina affects the participating community residents from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana. This approach is vital because, as Prus (1996) states, for something to exist it must be socially acknowledged. Prus (1996) notes that, through qualitative inquiry, an ethnography is one of the most helpful ways of producing knowledge about society. Creswell (1998) defines, "An ethnography as a description and interpretation of a cultural or social groups system" (p.68). Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) describe ethnographies as stories of relationships and experiences. The following interviews, detailing relationships and experiences, are constructed from field notes, tapes, and written narratives.

I interviewed thirteen residents, two of whom had their partners present, which raises the total number of contributing individuals to fifteen. I am included in the interviews, as I was a member of this community also. The interviews were between forty-five minutes and three hours in length. All were conducted in a natural setting chosen by the respondent, except for one phone interview. All respondents were residents of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana at the time of Hurricane Katrina. I used an interview guide consisting of ten open-ended questions and recorded all interviews. I took detailed field notes, and they concentrated on noting potential probe questions and marking nonverbal responses. In conducting the data analysis, I used

Wolcott's (1994) D.A.I. (description, analysis, and interpretation) model to assist in the examination of the dimensions of loss.

The understanding of the dimensions of loss and the associated grief dislocated communities from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana experienced due to Hurricane Katrina is important for several reasons. It adds to the understanding of the ways people attach meaning to objects, events, and their overall world. This information is useful in formulating decisions and policies that pertain to these individuals, both present and future, in situations which lead to dislocation. It also advances the knowledge on response to displaced and relocated communities to aid in future response efforts. Through comparison of the interviews to the existing literature on grief and loss, this thesis adds to that body of knowledge and allows for a deeper understanding of social norms surrounding grief and loss.

Chapter 2:

SETTING

Boothville-Venice: Pre- and Post-Katrina

The towns of Boothville and Venice, located on the west side peninsula of the Mississippi River, are roughly 1.5 hour's driving distance south of New Orleans on Hwy 23 at the southern-most inhabitable point of Louisiana in Plaquemines Parish. The mouth of the Mississippi River empties into the Gulf of Mexico at the southern end of Plaquemines Parish, or as it is often referred to by locals, the "end of the world" (Plaquemines Parish Government 2007). With a larger portion of Plaquemines Parish surrounded by open water and the steady decline of marshland, which serves as a buffer zone for Louisiana and a natural filter for the oceans, these areas are prone to natural disasters (Chiras 2001; Laska et al. 2004). So, for some, Hurricane Katrina's destruction came as no surprise.

The loss of Louisiana's coastland, a documented occurrence by researchers for years, warned that such a disaster could wreck havoc on this fragile area due to the decline of marshland (Laska et al. 2004). Past research also noted the destruction caused by hurricanes, such as Hurricane Camille of 1969 (Chabreck and Plamisano 1973). Dealing with these issues is a part of the culture for coastal areas. In pre-Katrina Boothville-Venice, community members had a unique culture because of their reliance on the environment. Traditional means of employment were manual labor jobs, such as commercial fishing, boat and net construction, and employment in the oil fields.

To understand the affect Katrina had on this community, it is necessary to answer the research question, 'How do community members of Boothville-Venice define their world pre-Katrina?' Statistical facts provide the accepted, tangible information about the area. According

to the 2000 census, the total population of the Plaquemines Parish was 26,757; less than ten percent of that population resided in Boothville-Venice - 2,220 people. At the time of the census, pre-Katrina, traditional means of employment included citrus farming, commercial fishing, offshore work, and a few small family-owned businesses. This fishery community is often referred to as a "Sportsman's Paradise" because many recreational fishermen visit this area. In the time before Katrina, this community lacked many elements that make up larger cities such as public transit, large office buildings, a hospital, more than a one public school, and even major chains for food and clothing. A small number of local convenient stores were sporadically situated, and the only grocery store between the two cities was Stumpf's Grocery located in Venice. Many residents' livelihoods depended on harvesting the bounty this rich environment provided – fish, shrimp, oysters, crabs, and the like. Also, the community provided a major jump point for helicopters to ferry workers to and from oil rigs. Along with the commercial industry, petroleum, a booming industry twenty years ago, was a major source of the economy in this region (Plaquemines Parish Government 2007; Wikipedia 2006). Some respondents expressed that these industries lead many to populate this area when profit was high, and as such, raise their children to be future generations in the industry. This leads to strong community bonds between families who lived in the area for an extended, cross-generational, period of time.

To demonstrate the closeness of this community, often children are taught by the same teachers who once taught their parents at the only school that existed in these two towns. A kindergarten-through-twelfth grade school, Boothville-Venice High School existed, because only in the combination of both towns were there enough students to necessitate a school. All respondents, except two, received education from the Boothville-Venice School. Boothville-Venice High School is considered the physical geographic link between Boothville and Venice,

and it was the only building to weather Hurricane Katrina with minimal damages. This institution was built fourteen feet above the ground after Hurricanes Betsy and Camille, which were two of the last major hurricanes to severely damage these towns. Though the school survived, it has not yet re-opened following Katrina because of a lack of residents (Wikipedia 2006). This school is important to this thesis because of its role as a physical location that combined the towns and also helped me develop my sample. Residents often lived in one town all their lives or moved between the two for want of not leaving this comfortable community.

> It's easy to grow up here. You don't have all the crime. You know everyone. You can actually sit outside, at night, you can sit outside and don't have to worry about someone hurting you, hurting your kids. Or your kids wanna go somewhere; you know they're going to be right here in the community. If someone sees 'em do anything they're gonna call you. I like that about the place. One road in, one road out. Small town. Big difference from what other people do. Big difference. You don't have crime and drive-by shootings. You do have your normal kids-doing-whatever, but nothing like most towns do. You know your neighbors. That's what I like about it. I know everyone. (Interviewee N)

The smallest group of individuals in the community is the family. Interviewees speak much of family unit within Boothville-Venice, Louisiana. Generational family closeness is at the heart of this area with extended family living so close sometimes they are right across the backyard. To illustrate the closeness of family ties, when a hurricane approaches, many evacuate as family units. They evacuate to homes of extended family outside of Plaquemines Parish, or rent and share several hotel rooms to save on money and to be close to one another. Family is a big component in the definition of each person and of the group.

Following Hurricane Katrina, issues of community stability came into question. Pre-Katrina, community members depended on other residents, not only for economy stability but in group relationships and defining community bonds. Community and family bonds kept members in Lower Plaquemines Parish. With residents displaced throughout the United States

following Katrina, the attachment to the area, along with interpersonal bonds, began to breakdown partially due to the uncertainty involving the future of coastal lying Boothville-Venice.

Living on the coast, residents embrace both the good and the bad aspects of life there. They discuss positives such as it being an area where "everybody knows everybody." Many livelihoods involve harvesting the rich bounty of the environment. Many expressed the positive experience where the community is small enough for the local school's graduating class to be between twenty or thirty students. On the other hand, leaving one's home yearly due to the threat of a hurricane is a reality. Every year, residents must leave their homes and many leave regardless of the storm level. Corresponding with the ties of community and family, each family developed its own system of evacuating.

Evacuation

Hurricanes pass near, or through, Louisiana every year, and as such, the adaptation to living in this area is being prepared to evacuate at a moments notice. Evacuation is a term citizens of Southern Louisiana understand and can call to mind actions and emotional responses related to this term. The evacuation before Katrina was like any other, the routine of packing and driving and worrying is where the "story" of Katrina begins for those interviewed for this study. Evacuation is the last sense of normality before Katrina hit for the respondents of this thesis.

Evacuation is a common thread, and more importantly an approach of narration, throughout the interviews, thus the act of leaving for a storm guides this analysis and thesis as a whole. Individuals, living in Lower Plaquemines, deal with evacuating due to hurricanes on a yearly basis, and evacuation is part of everyday life. From the middle of summer to the

beginning of November, residents partially define their world and adjust their actions to the reality that they may need to evacuate. Respondent B notes,

> We [are] used to having three to five hurricanes ever-year, in the hurricane season. So, I'm used to having to evacuate, getting my personal belongings, things I could not replace, and would tear my heart if I lost: my poetry, my art, gifts that were given to me that I don't think I could ever find again. The quick process of packing up and leaving - I'm used to it. But I never had to go through a hurricane that actually took everything I owned, but I'm used to the evacuations. I'm used to living in a hotel for a week to two weeks before we could go home.

Community members understand the risk and potential loss that may result in living in an area vulnerable to hurricanes. Many grow up hearing and sharing horror stories about, devastating storms such as, but not limited to, Betsy and Camille, and from an early age, learn the importance of being prepared. Many parents begin teaching their children at a young age how to pack for a storm. Respondent F spoke of leaving for Betsy and Camille and taught her children and grandchildren the responsibilities of living in a hurricane prone area and the process of leaving for a storm. She began by providing them Rubbermaid boxes and allowing them space to collect meaningful pieces to bring during evacuation.

Most residents gather their important personal belongings before the season begins, which is a year-round errand, so they are ready to leave as soon as possible. Others leave certain items packed for easy access all year-round. The notion of leaving for a storm is a fact that involves all other aspects of their lives, from children being in school to personal means of employment.

> When the storm was coming, we did what we normally do. Went to work that night, like any normal person would do. Next day, got everything ready to go and made the plan we were leaving. Soon as it becomes, voluntary, a lot of people leave. Mandatory, everything's kicked into high gear. (Interviewee N)

Many residents leave regardless of the storm level for fear of traffic trapping them on the road should they remain behind and then need to evacuate. "We were always the first ones out

because of the area where we lived. It was so vulnerable to the hurricanes; it was a low-lying area" (Interviewee H). Also, another a good reason to get out early mentioned by several respondents is that there is only one road in and out of the Parish by automobile. Boothville-Venice is so far south that if more northern cities evacuate, they will be entrapped on the highway behind more Northern evacuees.

These families are so accustomed to leaving for a storm that some referred to leaving as yearly vacations.

> That's what hurricane evacuation tends to be a lot of times. A three-day vacation, a three-day evacuation for no reason, but you want to be better safe than sorry, a lot of times. And so you will leave and there is no reason for you to have left, but you did not have that knowledge prior to leaving. So it is just a three day-vacation while you worry whether or not a hurricane will hit your house. (Respondent C)

This routine, comparable to a vacation, was also noted by Interviewee F; however, she mentions a distinct difference with Hurricane Katrina. "You just go on vacation for a few days; you know the only problem was, with this vacation [Katrina], you are not going home." The majority of the time, families return to clean their yard or wait for electricity to return. Katrina was different, residents knew they were not returning, thus this evacuation marks the beginning of many interviewees stories and the difference between other yearly hurricanes.

> Everybody leaves no matter what. It is like a three-day vacation if there is no hurricane to hit your house. It is like a three-day hell if the hurricane goes over where you lived, and you don't know what you will return back to. So if Hurricane Katrina had turned and just went north right into Alabama, everybody who had left and everybody in New Orleans who had left would just have another hurricane we evacuated for. Well that was a good vacation. You have to think of it like that because you always evacuated. You are constantly evacuating, especially in the Venice area, more so than anywhere else. (Interviewee C)

Living in a hurricane-affected area does not take over these people's existence. They do not stop functioning from normal life during those months. Residents live their lives, and if they must leave, they respond as they were taught and how generations before did so.

Chapter 3:

A THEORETICAL APPROACH

Introduction to Social-Psychological Theory

This thesis takes an approach constructed from a social-psychological understanding of the world where the individual and the group cannot be separated. This understanding accounts for the individual existing in the larger social context. Society is ever-changing and can be interpreted differently depending on the person and the context. An individual acts differently depending on the group he or she is in.

Traditionally, much of the research on loss and grief is examined using a thanatological and psychological approach. In the sociological realm of thanatology, three theoretical perspectives are often employed: structural-functionalism, social learning, and symbolic interactionism. Structural-functionalism notes that social structure, or a governing institution, is essential to human life and the social order of life. The social learning approach, the most psychological of the three, denotes that people learn from behaviors modeled in society and those models influenced by social norms (DeSpelder and Strickland 1999). The symbolic interactionist approach, which incorporates concepts of structural-functionalism and social learning along with the understanding that the individual is influenced by and in turn influences social norms, is the theory used to guide this thesis. The published research on loss and grief denotes them as a socially constructed, yet individually relevant, experiences. Using the theory of symbolic interactionism is the first step on the path to answering the research questions: How is loss socially constructed by residents of Boothville-Venice following Hurricane Katrina? Furthermore, how is grief expressed from loss? An understanding of how loss is socially constructed assists in this endeavor.

Conceptual Contributions of Thanatology and Psychology

To understand the sociological aspects of loss and grief, I provide you with the working definitions beginning with those from thanatology based in a psychological foundation. These definitions influence the sociological research in the study of loss and grief by providing a base vocabulary used throughout this thesis. Sociology and psychology disagree on the source behind the aspects of loss and grief but agree on base terminology.

Loss and grief studies take root in the academic field of thanatology (Fowlkes 1990). Brabant (1996) addresses parallels between terminology in psychology, sociology, and thanatology, and concludes that loss occurs when one no longer has something that was once his or hers. The terms bereavement and loss are interchangeable based on that understanding.

> Bereavement comes from a root word meaning 'shorn off or torn up' – as if something has been suddenly yanked away. The word thus conveys a sense of a person's being deprived, of having something stripped away against one's will, of being robbed. In this sense, bereavement signifies a force that comes from outside as a violent, destructive action taken against us. (DeSpelder and Strickland 1999:224)

The result of one's personal reflection of bereavement is grief. Grief is experienced in varying degrees based on the significance of the loss or bereavement. Scholars of thanatology construct the definition of grief in internal terms.

> Grief includes emotions, mental perceptions, and physical reactions. It encompasses how theperson feels, thinks, eats, sleeps, and so on. Grief is a response to the recognitionthat the loss is permanent and unchangeable. As with bereavement, grief is often thought of in negative terms: heartbreak, anguish, distress, suffering – a burdensome emotional state. Yet, the range of emotions that may be present in a survivor's grief include not only sorrow and sadness, but also relief, anger, disgust, and self-pity. (DeSpelder and Strickland 1999:225)

Horowitz (1990) examines the psychological response to grief as a dual process between emotions and cognition. He limits his study to these areas and does not consider outside influences; this parallels the traditional understanding in scholarly examination of grief and loss.

This viewpoint is not to be disregarded since emotion and cognition influence response to loss, though not solely. If this were the case, then individuals would consider each loss's significance and grieve it on a unique basis as no two people are the same. Given this unique individual world, no one would ever react with dismay to another person's response since everyone has their own individual response to grief and uniqueness is expected. As this is not the case, and individuals do view other's connection to the loss and expressions of grief as odd or out of place, then there must be some social norm to which members of the society must prescribe. Thus, many of the psychological studies of loss and grief fail to consider the outside forces that regulate our responses to loss. It is only through the social context of the construction of the rules and regulations for loss and grief that the answer to all of this thesis's questions can be discovered.

The complete understanding of loss and grief for an individual cannot be measured without a person's social context. From the moment one enters the world, he or she interacts in society. Through interaction, one shapes his or her entire life (Goffman 1959), and the process of socialization influences the way he or she responds to events such as loss. Grief and bereavement, though both personal and studied from an individualistic approach, are products of socialization (DeSpelder and Strickland 1999). Until recently, both loss and grief have been traditionally examined as a process affecting no one other than the person experiencing the loss. While this sets a good foundation for the study of grief and bereavement, it is possible to develop this process more by studying people's experience of loss through the lens of society.

Applications of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism assists in understanding how previous ideas, such as loss and grief, provide meaning and shape the affected world. Goffman (1959) discusses that people act

and react along similar means and constraints universally within a given social context. The way they believe others view them influences people and their actions. As with grief, if one perceives that society does not recognize his or her loss as significant, he or she may not wear a face of grieving publicly (Doka 1989). After a brief historical review on symbolic interactionism, the main theoretical examination focuses on Goffman's work and uses those concepts with Blumer's ideas to develop the social construction of loss, the expression grief, and the rules and regulations of each.

Searle (1995) begins his discussion on social construction by defining "institutional facts." Institutional facts are truths that are dependant on human definition and observation in order to exist. These are in existence because society has dictated that these are the social necessities for a specific environment. Without humans to experience this environment, these objects are reduced to their physical elements, merely sounds, cloth, and people. The existence of the human experience is centered, and is viewed, as real by everyday social experiences (Prus 1996). Symbolic interactionism is the,

> …fundamental notion that the self, individual and collective action, interpretation, the social construction of meaning, social control, society, as well as social structure and change, have their sources in and are lodged in the emergent process of human association. This association is profoundly social in that it is accomplished through symbolic interaction. (Morrion 2003:5)

One exists in a pre-constructed world. How one reacts to one's world is guided by social norms. Personal, social, and future social norms are created through the reactions and performances of individuals in groups (Prus 1996). Blumer (2003) examined the defining process which is the interplay between individuals and groups in a society. An object, an event, a situation, and many other elements of life can only exist if society recognizes them. If a definition of an element is not placed, that element will not exist in that society.

One such element recognized in society is loss and the resulting display of grief, or mourning. There are socially predetermined ideas of how an individual or group should respond to a loss (Brabant 1996; DeSpelder and Strickland 1999). "Studies indicated that human response to loss is not genetically determined but culturally learned" (DeSpelder and Strickland 1999:86). Brabant (1996) notes mourning follows the appropriate behaviors society dictates on the expression of grief. She also recognizes that traditions grow and change over time due to the experiences of social members.

Mourning is an example of an element for which society frequently redefines and reshapes the rules. "Culture affects more than simply the expression of grief. It influences patterns of attachment, defining the meaning of different losses, influencing who one mourns as well as the intensity of that grief" (Doka and Martin 2002:339). Also, these socially recognized norms differ from culture to culture (DeSpelder and Strickland 1999). Blumer (2003) explains that the development of meaning placed by societies promotes social change. It is through such change that the expression of mourning can develop over time to include once socially unrecognized acts as viable methods of mourning within a given culture.

There exist a number of different cultures in our world with different socially acceptable actions and reactions to events. It is culture that influences one's actions, and individuals "self-regulate" due to society's views, social rules, and constraints (Goffman [1955] 1999). Goffman (1959) did not support the academic discussion of people outside of social contexts because, as he notes, the human self arises from social situations. This leads to Goffman's deconstruction of social interaction and the rules it creates. He provides terminology and working definitions in an effort to discover how individuals and their reality are socially influenced and constructed.

People base their actions on how they believe others view them. Goffman (1959) argues that, in society, people put on different "faces." Individuals project a specific "face" depending on how they want to be seen by others. For example, a resident of Boothville-Venice has a different "face" for home than he or she does for work. The "line," a set of spoken and unspoken acts, is what the individual believes he or she should obey in a social situation, such as work; individuals have different "faces" for different "lines" (Goffman [1955] 1999). Goffman (1959) claims, that people act and react along similar means and constraints universally, and it is through the collective understanding that they have a unified image of reality.

Goffman (1959) draws out a number of different definitions important to the understanding of human identity across different cultures. To put it simply, individuals act the way they do because other members of their social group, or "team," impact their decisions. Goffman defines "team" as a group existing in one "line" and working together toward a single goal. One's "team" creates rules and standards, influencing how one responds to events and how one believes others in society view oneself. A "team" size can range from all of a culture, down to a particular society, and even as small as a family. The teams addressed in this thesis are families and social groups, pre- and post- Katrina. "Teams" create the social setting, and social settings influence individual actions and perceptions. In answering the question: How is loss socially constructed by residents of Boothville-Venice following Hurricane Katrina? I examine the influence of "teams" in creating this social setting.

One continues to fit and function in the "team" as long as one follows the "line" set forth by the "team." The line "is, a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this, his evaluation of the participants, especially himself" (Goffman [1955] 1999:330). To maintain acceptance by the "team," people act in accordance

with the "line" (Goffman [1955] 1999, 1959). Different settings with the same "team," or different "teams" with the same setting may have different "lines." The way one acts Pre-Katrina is different from the way one acts Post-Katrina because "lines" differed for the displaced residents since the social situation changed. Also, the process of defining "lines" influences how one acts, and future actions, in accordance with the "line" (Kivisto and Pittman 2001).

Kivisto and Pittman (2001) deconstruct the actions of the "line" into further sects such as 'role,' 'script,' 'costume,' and the physical location. Individuals must play the 'role' in the "line" they are in. The provided 'script,' allowable communication for a situation, enforces that 'role.' Some 'scripts' are open to more personal input while others are not, but all "scripts" reinforce interactions preferred by the "team" for a setting. The 'costumes' worn are one of the most straightforward ways to distinguish different 'roles' in a situation. Different 'roles' require different costumes and physical environments for events to take place. Kivisto and Pittman (2001) discuss these physical environments as the 'stages and sets,' and they are where 'roles,' 'scripts,' and 'costumes' are put into action. How a 'stage' looks is not created by accident but intentionally shaped. All of these elements combined, shape what member's actions and what they perceive. These influencing parameters of a physical and social environment are part of what Searle (1995) refers to as "institutional facts," and they only exist within, and because of, the institution in which they exist – i.e., a family, work, or even a specific culture.

Culture influences "lines" through commonly agreed upon patterns of reactions to events, and loss is one such event. How people deal with loss is influenced by whether they are allowed to mourn, or respond to loss. Fowlkes (1990) has two overall themes in her writing: first is social regulation of grief, and second is addressing the role of intimacy in a relationship. She points out that a culture governs the rules, or "lines," in which we live, but essentially individuals

learn to self-govern from their home life. Loss and grief is socially constructed and society provides an understanding of what is acceptable to grieve and what is the right way to mourn. Fowlkes (1990) discusses that, if a loss is not socially recognized then the intimacy in a relationship, the "line" in which the relationship is held, and the 'roles' one plays are not accepted either. All "lines" and responses to them are influenced by the one's society (Goffman [1955] 1999, 1959).

"Teams" influence "lines," and individuals react to the "line" they are presently in through the "face" that he or she is wearing, which is in itself in accordance to the "team" and "line." The personal representation one puts forth in a particular "line" is considered to be one's "face."

> The term *face* may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact…. One's own face and the face of others are constructs of the same order; it is the rules of the group and the definition of the situation which determine how much feeling one is to have for face and how this feeling is to be distributed among the face involved. (Goffman 1959:330-331)

One's "face" is governed by social norms modeled for a person from birth. Cooley ([1902] 1999) discusses that we mold our face based on a three step process. The first is to imagine what we believe others see. Next is how we believe they feel about what they see, and finally, our reaction to this societal mirror (are we pleased with the reaction we feel others have?). Through social interaction, an individual learns the rules and regulations he or she will model. These socially recognized norms and rules differ from culture to culture, or team to team. Rules are defined by society and set the guidelines for an individual's "face" (Goffman 1959). Accordingly, individuals from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana wore different "faces" for business, family, and recreational "teams." Different "lines" prompt different "faces" for one to portray; furthermore, the "face" of the "line" is impacted by the way members of the same "team" define

the situation (Goffman 1959). Pre-Katrina, interviewees each had a reality with "teams," "lines," and "faces;" however, Post-Katrina, these "teams," "lines" and "faces" underwent change because the reality which they created became devastated.

The responses to certain situations are learned over time by the culture we grow up in (DeSpelder and Strickland 1999). Removal from that culture provides new challenges as one enters into unfamiliar culture (Shami 1993), as is the case with those displaced from Boothville-Venice. Fowlkes (1990) discusses that after a loss, it is not only the society we live in that dictates grieving norms. How an individual experiences grief and expresses mourning is central focused in the family. Culture influences family customs, and the "face" an individual is portraying and the rules and regulations taught within the family unit provide a model to follow. These models pass to the next generation. Children observe adults experiencing loss, and how the parent responds provides the model, 'roles,' 'script,' and 'customs,' for their children later in life (DeSpelder and Strickland 1999).

To review the relationship of terms, Goffman (1959) relays that all individuals strive to adapt themselves to the setting they are in. He reviews the "line" as the result of social interaction, and one's "face" exists in the context of the "line." In relation to Blumer's (2003) concept of the "definition of the situation," an individual's "face" depends on the definition of the "line." The "line" is defined by society and governed by "team," thus prompting the "face" members put forth (Goffman 1959). With the understanding that "team," "line," and "face" create a reality for individuals, we will now examine the change in reality based on social change, and the issues that arise for those whose reality must be rediscovered. This correlates to the displaced individuals from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana as their reality underwent severe change due to Hurricane Katrina.

The Application of Concepts: Symbolic Interactionism and the Social Construction of

Loss and Grief

Given the understanding of the social construction of reality, through symbolic interactionism, I now examine how social change affects those within that society. I do this by using concepts in symbolic interactionism focusing on when one's "face" is not conforming to the "team" and "line." Also, I use an intersection of sociology and thanatology concerning unacknowledged loss and grief. Residents from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana, in many aspects, had to reconstruct their reality due to change brought about by Hurricane Katrina. The social regulation of groups assists in the development of the individual's construction of his or her world.

> Just as there is stock of common objects or images belonging to one's group, which one uses to identify what one notes, so there is a stock of common definitions to use in evaluating the objects that enter into the act. Thus, wants and needs, goals and objectives, schemes of execution, facilities to be used in carrying through the act, images of oneself, and acts of others to common definitions by people sharing a common universe of discourse or a common stock of meanings. This condition explains why so many individual acts are alike in the life of a given group. (Blumer 2003: 92)

Blumer (2003) mentioned the issues that arise when members of a social group differ in their norms and how they define a situation, such as different societies having different "faces" for the same "line;" example, displaced members of Boothville-Venice mourning their lost homes while others believe they should be excited because they could get new homes. Marris (1975) examines the loss and grief individuals experience by addressing relocation, a typically overlooked experience which impacts individuals and groups deeply. He notes loss can come in many forms, but it often leads to grief which he claims grief is the result of change. For the application of this study, I use his examination on changes families and communities face when they are made to relocate. In his study, Marris (1975) discusses that there were families who

were extremely excited to be moving out of the "slums," so they could get into a better neighborhood, have a better life for their families, or simply for the change of a new home. Then, what were originally feelings of excitement and happiness changed into feelings of loss and grief as families strived to maintain past 'roles' while integrating into new social settings.

Goffman (1959) believed that the difference in understanding and representation in the social setting may motivate humans to conform. Prior to conforming, issues can arise as newcomers interact in an attempt to learn the ways of their new society. If a person puts forth an incorrect "face" which does not follows the current "line," the individual may be slighted by the group.

> A person may be said to *be in wrong face* when information is brought forth in some way about his social worth which cannot be integrated, even with effort, into the line that is being sustained for him. A person may be said to *be out of face* when he participates in a contact with others without having ready a line of the kind participants in such situations are expected to take. (Goffman [1955] 1999:331)

The fear of rejection from one's social group is so powerful that individuals strive to conform to the group's "line." If rejection from the group takes place, feelings of shame and inadequacy may emerge (Goffman [1955] 1999). Brabant (1996) discusses that feelings of guilt and shame are not biological but social constructs. People will go to great lengths to cooperate to keep "face" (Goffman [1955] 1999), even hiding mourning of a loss for fear of one's rejection (Doka 1989). Entering into a new social group requires learning and conforming to new "lines" to be accepted, this leaves no room for socially unacceptable "faces" to be displayed. Such was the case for those displaced resident of Boothville-Venice who had to adapt to new "lines" without displaying a "wrong face," such as mourning.

An example of "out of face" in thanatology is disenfranchised grief. Doka (1989) defines disenfranchised grief as "…the grief that a person experiences when they incur a loss that is not,

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or cannot, be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported" (p. 4). He believes that some individuals and groups, are not typically allowed to mourn, and are shunned when they try to express their grief. One must experience grief, on both personal and societal levels, and one's grief needs to be acknowledged by others for a more thorough resolution (Doka and Martin 2002). The labeling of mourning as "out of face" in the "line," grieving norms, leads individuals to contain their grief in an effort to conform and be accepted. Such an event can lead to disenfranchised grief (Doka 1989).

Doka (1989) outlines five ways people are disenfranchised in the American culture. If a loss does not occur in the family, the bond between individuals is not identified as legitimate by society. If society does not legitimize a loss, it does not socially exist. If the people experiencing grief due to a loss are not acknowledged by society, they are disenfranchised. If the loss is considered socially deviant, society often ignores it. Lastly, if the way an individual expresses his or her grief is seen as deviant, society may reject his or her grief (Doka 2002). This social isolation can feed a number of different emotions the griever may be experiencing, and they can include or lead to feelings of guilt and self-blame (Doka 1989). When disenfranchised grief is recognized and addressed in society, the resolution of the grief can lead to change in the social construction of grief and loss.

The Setting section above details the socially constructed reality of Boothville-Venice Pre-Katrina. During the evacuation for Hurricane Katrina, we see how that reality no longer existed and needed reshaping due to this loss. Along with the understanding of how social change takes place, we gain a better grasp of traditional and non-traditional loss which assists in answering the question: How is loss socially constructed by residents of Boothville-Venice following Hurricane Katrina?

The existing literature in symbolic interactionism supports that loss and grief are socially constructed. In comparing the pre-Katrina reality to the post-Katrina reality one uncovers the loss of reality. The social construction of their loss is what society allows these residents to mourn, defined by legitimate relationship to what is lost; therefore, loss is obtained from what society allows the loser to mourn which is how loss is socially constructed for members of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana. This understanding provides a basis for answering the second question: How is grief from loss experienced by community members from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana? To answer this question, I have to understand what exactly was lost and the reactions to that loss as expressed by the interviewees themselves. I use the tool of ethnography to gain information on the social construction of loss for community members as Prus (1996) claims that qualitative inquiry, especially ethnography, is one of the most helpful ways of producing knowledge about society.

In answering the main research question, "What is the understanding of loss and grief community members from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana experienced to do Hurricane Katrina?" the following questions must first be answered:

"How do community members of Boothville-Venice define their world pre-Katrina and post-Katrina?" Now that the tools of how loss is socially constructed, and grief from this loss is understood, I can develop from the social construct on the social development of loss to answer the second question of, "How is loss socially constructed by residents of Boothville-Venice following Hurricane Katrina? Furthermore, how is grief expressed from loss?"

The answer to this second question leads to the final two questions of this thesis: "What dimensions of loss emerge from the overall experience of loss?" and "How does this

understanding of loss and grief community members affected by Hurricane Katrina relate or add to the existing literature on loss and grief?"

Chapter 4:

QUALITATIVE METHODS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

Data

In developing an understanding of the loss and grief community members from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana experienced due to Hurricane Katrina, I conducted thirteen interviews with a total of fifteen respondents. The interviews are between forty-five minutes and three hours in length, and all were conducted in a natural setting chosen by the respondent, except for one phone interview. All respondents were residents of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana at the time of Hurricane Katrina. The following chart (Chart 1) is a flow chart relating the flow of the snowball sample through the respondents. The subsequent table (Table 1) is a breakdown of the demographic information of the thirteen respondents along with two contributing spouses. Field notes are the other type of data collected. For each of the interviews conducted, I took detailed field notes. In these notes, I address the times and setting and concentrate on noting potential probe questions and marking nonverbal responses. These notes assisted in the writing of the interviewee's stories especially with the addition of nonverbal response adding to the description of their accounts.

Chart 1

Chart of Interviewees: Snowball Sample
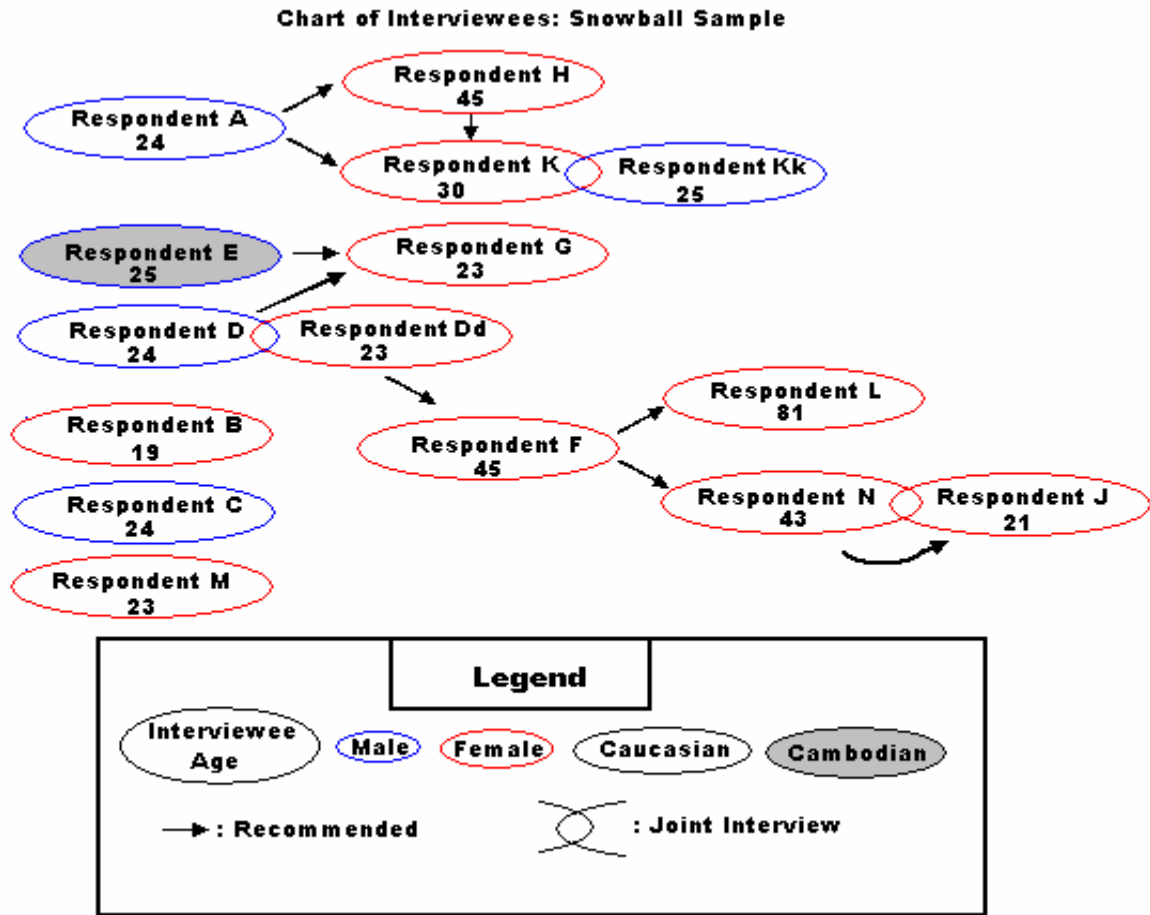
Interviewee	Age	SEX	Race	Marital Status	Recommended
A	24	M	Caucasian	Single	H, K
B	19	F	Caucasian	Single	
C	25	M	Caucasian	Engaged	
D	24	M	Caucasian	Engaged	G
Dd	23	F	Caucasian	Engaged	F
E	25	M	Cambodian	Single	G
F	45	F	Caucasian	Married	L, N
G	23	M	Caucasian	Single	
H	45	F	Caucasian	Married	K
J	21	F	Caucasian	Betrothed	
K	30	F	Caucasian	Married	
Kk	25	M	Caucasian	Married	
L	81	F	Caucasian	Widowed	
M	23	F	Caucasian	Engaged	
N	43	F	Caucasian	Married	J

Table 1

The strategy of inquiry employed for the qualitative study is ethnography. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as,

> an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in [a] natural setting. (P.15)

The depth of qualitative research allows for a detailed account of participants. An ethnographic approach supports the development in understanding loss and grief community members faced due to Hurricane Katrina. Creswell (1998) defines, "An ethnography is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group system" (p.58). The residents of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana are the social group examined in this thesis. Spradley (1979) discusses that an ethnographic analysis is ideal when one wants to know about relationships and the different ways people view and make sense of a relationship. He defines, "Ethnographic analysis is the search for parts of a culture and their relationships as conceptualized by informants" (p. 93). Residents of Boothville-Venice relay their perceptions of various relationships both pre- and post-Katrina, and the resulting expression of grief due to their loss. Researchers strive to develop an understanding of the social world. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) discuss ethnographies as stories of relationships and experiences. Stories are constructed from field notes, audio recordings, and written narratives. They discuss ethnographic research as the study of daily life. Through audio recording and field notes, residents of Boothville-Venice relay their descriptions of daily live both pre- and post-Katrina.

For researchers to examine and write about life, it is essential for ethnographers to build rapport with the groups they study. Furthermore, a researcher must be able to put into text what they observe. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) note,

> Field notes are accounts *describing* experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner. But writing descriptive accounts of experiences and observations is not as straightforward and transparent a process as it might initially appear. (P.5)

A researcher must be able to relate to whom and what they observe so other scholars can understand and utilize existing bodies of knowledge. Being a resident of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana for the majority of my life, a rapport existed with the respondents interviewed as well as an understanding of the culture which allows for informed relating of the information gathered. One of the first steps in this process, which is also a tool throughout, is the movement between participants, field notes, existing literature, analysis, and writing (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995).

As a researcher, I must exist in a number of different worlds to address the understanding of loss and grief. I join the setting of participants, share an arena with colleagues, and have an individual personal world outside of my work (Wolf 1996). All these settings differ and impact each other; Wolf (1996) discusses researchers addressing their locations. For only in the explanation of motive and point-of-view can we truly see the lens through which the researcher views and relays his or her subject matter, and as such, we can better ascertain the reality of the subject matter. Existing in academia provides me the terms and tools needed to discuss the other settings in which I live and study. Depending on whom the audience is, a researcher must be able to convey knowledge to the academy and to the everyday person, and this issue is being addressed on a number of levels including ethical concerns involving participants and how they are represented (Wolf 1996).

Stewart (1998) addresses the issue of connections prior to research, where a relationship between the researcher, setting, and participants already exists, as with my research for this thesis which is set in my hometown. When a researcher chooses an area or field of study, there

is at least one personal interest or investment driving his or her pursuit, thus a relationship is present before the study officially begins (Wolf 1996). The personal investment of this thesis for me was residents' loss due to Katrina paralleling my studies of loss prior to Katrina. There is some preexisting reason researchers chose to study an area, and this personal relationship can result in bias. Other approaches to knowledge, like that of a feminist critique, believe that complete objectivity is impossible; however, some objectivity can come from identifying the researcher's interests. The bias of this thesis is my deep involvement in the community of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana prior to Hurricane Katrina; however, as a researcher, I strive to reduced the amount of bias and provide objectivity by highlighting my connection. Also, as Wolf (1996) points out, a more interactive, honest process needs to be supported in addition to the recognition of power a researcher holds.

When researchers enter into the field, they must question whether they are influencing the behavior of the respondents and thus raising an issue of reliability. Stewart (1998) states that ethnographic research is not generalizable, lacks consistency, and is dependent on the setting of the study. These factors compromise the objectivity of ethnographic research. The three problems he addresses are bias, replication, and specification. Stewart questions whether ethnography can be reproduced. It is difficult for another researcher to come into a study and replicate it because reading, analyzing, and interpreting someone else's field notes may present a major challenge. Along with bias, this thesis presents a challenge due to timing and social group differences because it studies a devastated culture during a time of transition post-disaster, an isolated period of time. Cole (1994) professes that sociology may be related to history; in that, as history can show us a result of certain chains of events, so can sociology guide us as to what might happen in certain situations given certain catalysts, but no certainties can be given and

replicated, as in other sciences. Wallace (1995) counters Cole's (1994) argument claiming that while no definite outcomes of events can be guaranteed from sociology, a societal reaction can be ascertained with some degree of certainty. These counterpoints provide a means to address the issues of conducting ethnographic research (Stewart 1998). To this affect, scholars need to discuss in their text the way they choose their study and draw conclusions. The following defines ethnographic research and my reasons for using it for this thesis.

There are guides to qualitative research, but a scholar does not have to follow traditional formats of study. Ethnographic studies have rigor and flexibility; one may utilize a number of different means of data collection (Creswell 1998). This thesis focuses on in-depth responses from people's experience following Hurricane Katrina using interviews and fields note allowed by this open format. Spradley (1979) discusses that conducting an ethnographic study differs from traditional knowledge pursuits. Much of research, usually quantitative, begins by addressing a problem then developing a hypothesis. Spradley notes that many hypothesizes are developed after one collects and analyzes the data.

I shaped the ten, open-ended questions constructed for this thesis' interview to seek understanding in the overall experience of life pre- and post-Katrina. Furthermore, I created them to build and understanding of the respondent's experience in regards to Katrina. The questions developed this way because I wanted to see what emerged from the interviews without preconceived answers. Once I starter to analyze the transcripts of the interviews, I realized that the respondents' understanding was through reality of life and what they lost due to Katrina. The themes emerged and shaped into the dimensions of loss experienced. This, along with my understanding of traditional and non-traditional loss, allowed for a comparison to the existing literature of loss and grief.

In ethnographies, a hypothesis develops as the themes and patterns develop out of the data collected. Next, a researcher develops a descriptive piece of text that represents the existing body of knowledge and the new data and concepts addressed (Spradley 1979). The new data and concepts addressed are the description of the experience of loss of residents. Then the question, "How does the understanding of loss and grief of community members affected by Hurricane Katrina relate or add to the existing literature on loss and grief?" is answered because it relates the new information to the existing literature of grief and loss.

Grills (1998) discusses professional obligations versus personal ethics in relation to the research and the participants. He notes that all participants must give consent, they must be given a chance to remove themselves from the study, and they must be made aware of any potential risks. Before all interviews for this thesis took place, each participant gave consent, and they again gave consent on tape. Each was told that they would remain anonymous, that tapes would be destroyed at the completion of the thesis, and each would receive a copy of the thesis after its completion. Field research, like participant observation, may compromise an examination if the subjects know they are being studied. On the other hand, ethics can also be viewed as a resource. Participants who understand that the researcher has a high standard of ethical consideration for them may be more inclined to trust the researcher and share their stories. The relationship between a participant and a researcher will impact the work so it is necessary to protect respondents (Grills 1998).

In gathering data, a researcher collects oral histories, or in-depth guided interviews, which allows an interviewee to speak for him or herself in the study. When one allows a respondent to represent him or herself, there is a higher chance her story is being told honestly. Wolf (1996) also recognizes the legitimacy of an author's reflections on his or her work, and

suggests sharing those reflections with the participants. As a researcher, I employ this approach and use it for this thesis.

Researcher's Role

Diane Wolf (1996) discusses the researcher role in conducting a project, and she questions whether one can study an area or group without exerting power of the group. Can you "…write about the oppressed without becoming the oppressors" (Patai 1991:139)? Positivists would say 'yes', but feminists would lean toward 'no', or at least argue caution (Wolf 1996). This is an issue I address regularly as a researcher and as a participant since Boothville-Venice, Louisiana was where I was born and raised. Thus, I feel a need to accurately represent this community as I have seen others fail to do after interviewing my father, a foremost authority on the area. Wolf (1996) addresses some issues and contradictions a researcher, primarily a feminist researcher, confronts in conducting field research. Wolf points out that whether researchers acknowledge it or not, they face ethical, personal, academic, and political dilemmas. Furthermore, Wolf discusses the underlying concern in conducting research with the personal power of the researcher. Wolf explains that women, especially feminist women, are more likely to confront these issues; she explains that this is due to the manner in which females are socialized. Much of feminist research is conducted to promote change, especially change again in the socialization of women. Feminists argue that a true disconnect is impossible between researcher and subject matter, and this personal involvement can affect the truth in relaying the research.

Blain (1998) directly addresses the question of whose truth a researcher is trying to understand and explain when plying his or her trade. Blain examined how groups make sense of their social world; she examined this for two years by interviewing researchers and trying to

discover how they addressed that situation when it arose. In conducting qualitative researcher, she states that scholars must change the way they present themselves to the group. She explains that academics enter into the field and community's members are not open to responding, which may be due to how the researcher is presenting himself or herself – through clothing or speech. When such a difference is present it highlights the drastically different backgrounds a scholar has in comparison to the group he or she is studying. She explains that one can not hope to write about a group without understanding the history and area of the community. Blain states that researchers must put themselves in a situation where they can truly understand the participant and see the world as the respondent does; one must take into account the social context of his or her respondent.

One of the main reasons I am cautious when it comes to studying the residents of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana is due to my father's experience with researchers. At one time, he was a local activist for the commercial fisherman. While growing up, I witnessed him interviewed by local educators, academics, and journalists because of his knowledge of Coastal Louisiana. I observed that once the studies were completed, he never heard back from the researchers and later he often found out that his words were misconstrued. Whether intentional or not, I can never know, but this left me with an understanding of the impact researchers may have on a community member whom they mined for information.

As mentioned earlier, the setting of my thesis is my hometown where, prior to this research project, I had an existing rapport with the community's members. I had access to my data because I was from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana, but due to Hurricane Katrina, many residents were displaced or chose to relocate. This existing relationship helped me obtain in-depth interviews. While a relationship allows for ease in interview communication, small talk

does creep into the conversations leading the interviews astray. Also, when it came to relating the information to the thesis, I had to be cautious of over exposing the individual's personal lives known to me but not discussed during the field work.

While conducting my fieldwork, I found that I moved back and forth between social worlds. Under Goffman's ([1955] 1999, 1959) understanding of the social world, I put on different "faces" for each "line." When I was in the field, I dressed in jeans, a t-shirt, and boots, which are fairly common attire for the people of Boothville-Venice. When I met my professors to discuss my thesis, I was often in slacks, a blouse, and heels. The worlds differed in locale as well with interviews often taking place in homes, while scholarly meetings often took place in offices. The worlds did have overlaps though as some interviews and meetings took place in coffee shops. Also, when I was called into the office from the field, others recognized – and usually commented on – my lack of formal attire and my Cajun accent. My manner of speech was unconsciously different when I was in the field, so when I entered on to a different "stage," with different characters, and I was wearing a different "face." Sometimes, other characters picked up on my bordering identities (Babbie 2004). My ability to adapt to my social setting has assisted in respondents sharing their stories more freely, which allows for a truer representation of the area. The adaptability also led to respondents being open enough to recommend others.

Limitations' Ethical Consideration

This study confines itself to interviews of residents from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina. The fifteen participants chosen were community members of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana before Katrina. Arguably this presents limits in the scope of this thesis because of the small sample size in comparison to all of Coastal Louisiana, and this is only a reflection of one community. In contrast, these limitations are also what allow for an in-depth

understanding of their experience, and because of the depth, it may be generalizable to other coastal lying areas. Furthermore, this ethnography is a qualitative study examining loss and grief. The time constraints of this project are a possible limitation in compilation of material and in locating displaced residents from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana. I address this challenge by utilizing snowball sampling to contact participants of the sample.

The participants will receive a copy of the study once it is completed but before it is published. Before I conduct the interview permission was received from each respondent and I suggested that they let me know if they though misrepresentation or misleading occurred at any time during the process of the interview. After I complete the thesis, the tapes will be destroyed as promised.

Data Collection

The main method of data collection used for this thesis is in-depth interviews. I contacted the initial interviewee, or the "gatekeeper," due to the existing rapport between us. All fifteen respondents chosen were residents of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana at the time of Hurricane Katrina. Snowball sampling is the procedure used to develop the sample for this thesis. Babbie (2004), defines snowball sampling as, "A nonprobability sampling method often employed in filed research whereby each person interviewed may be asked to suggest additional people for interviewing" (p. 184). I chose this technique for two reasons: First, it is an advised procedure for developing a sample for and ethnographic study that builds off of each interview. Second, as Babbie (2004) discusses it is a useful techniques to locate members of a group that are difficult to locate. Community members from Boothville-Venice were displaced or chose to relocate because of Katrina, so this was the ideal procedure to develop my sample.

All but one interview conducted took place in the respondent's chosen setting. The fieldwork settings included participants' homes, laundromats, and coffee shops. These locations were chosen by the respondents. The one interview conducted over the phone was due to the respondent's move across the country from Louisiana. I recorded all interviews and received consent on tape during the interview. I used an interview guide consisting of ten open-ended questions to direct the discussion (see Appendix). I took detailed field notes concentrated on noting potential probe questions and marking nonverbal responses.

Guided by Oliver, Serovich, and Mason's (2005) work, I transcribed my interviews using some denaturalized and naturalized techniques. A denaturalized approach is concerned with overall meaning and getting to the heart of what the participant discusses. With this, one takes and an exact verbal transcription, but utterances are not included. Overall I am looking for content, so the denaturalized approach is strongly influential. I employed the naturalized technique – precise wording, seeking as much detail as possible - when details like utterances and long pauses were necessary to include in the telling of a participant's story. Furthermore, when a denaturalized approach is taken, field notes consisting of nonverbal responses are utilized to assist in understanding one's history. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) refer to field notes as a means to piece together concepts. One of the main reasons I taped my interviews is because it allows me to concentrate on nonverbal responses during the interview. Filed notes assisted in distinguishing between breaks for distraction or breaks for gathering thought. Oliver, Serovich, and Mason's (2005) denaturalized approach guided me to note the difference of non-verbal responses, so when transcripts were analyzed, as I used my field notes to piece together the overall context, thus providing a clearer picture of the interview. Also, using the naturalized

technique allowed me build on the overall contextual picture because utterances added context, but only when necessary to carry the explanation along.

Objectivity in Ethnography

Kirk and Miller (1986) explain that qualitative research allows for a number of ways to assess the world and consider objectivity. Some researchers debate that it is best to have one overall way of viewing the world while others state that it is best to embrace the alternatives. Other researchers see the world as dependent on the examiners perspective, and a researcher's objectives will dictate what methods they employ. Being a scholar allows the opportunity and tools to better explain another world in my life. I cannot be completely separate from the area of study, so instead of disregarding this relationship I use it to assist in the explanation of community members of Boothville-Venice's understanding of loss and the resulting grief due to Katrina. This does not mean that the methods employed for this thesis is the only way of going about studying this topic. Kirk and Miller (1986) discuss how an empirical reality does exist, and the pursuit of truth is in the arrangement of understanding what exists. A challenge this view presents is the understanding of the world is subjective, and to address a study does not guarantee that everyone will view it the same way or come to the same conclusion. Like culture and social groups differ, a single way of viewing the world does not exist. With this in mind, within the times and setting of this thesis, if the same techniques and rigor are employed a common understanding may develop.

Epistemology studies the relationship between the knower and what is known (Prus 1996; Wolf 1996). Historically, the approach to knowledge discourages a relationship between the researcher and the subject; however, since a researcher chooses the area of study there is at the very least some pre-knowledge or investment in his or her pursuit. A relationship is present

before the study officially begins (Wolf 1996). I have a personal connection to what this thesis examines and this connection may be viewed as advantageous or not. This thesis began with preexisting relationships which allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the reality of Boothville-Venice pre- and post-Katrina. Some may argue this clouds my assessment, but the knowledge obtained before this thesis on social construction, loss, and grief assists in understanding the loss community members experienced following Hurricane Katrina. Also, this prior knowledge helps explain how their expression to the loss and grief allowed this thesis and its research questions to take shape. Wolf (1996) points out everything has a motive; whether one is conducting research for a professor, personal research for a thesis, or researching an area because of funds from a grant; all of these motives guide and influence studies. Motives of this thesis are to develop a better understanding of what community members experience due to Katrina, and to allow members to expresses their experience in their own words, also fulfilling the requirements for a Masters Degree.

Wolf (1996) claims that the concept that an objective reality exists and can be discovered historically drives positivist pursuit of knowledge. It is possible to conduct a study without personal gain; as mentioned above personal motives are unavoidable. A researcher can achieve objectivity by maintaining a distance between the research and the researcher. I achieved distance by repeatedly questioning whether previous knowledge influenced my analysis, during the coding process I continually double-checked my themes by rereading and reanalyzing the transcripts, then cross-checking for consistency and outliers in the coded transcripts. A study can also be replicable and universal. Under the similar constraints, this thesis may be repeated and transferable to other small coastal areas devastated.

Reliability and Validity

As Creswell (2003) notes, the reliability of a study is less significant than the validity when dealing with qualitative inquiry. I still think it is important to outline out how I ensure a level of reliability. In my thesis, I detailed out my involvement, motivations, and pre-existing relationship with the area. Second, I provide as much background information about each respondent as possible without giving away confidential information. Third, in-depth interviews, with open-ended questions and an initial probe question add to the similar manner in which each interview takes place. Last, the in-depth analysis is detailed so that another researcher may as closely as possible, replicate the analysis of information obtained.

Kirk and Miller (1986) discuss that objectivity is broken into reliability, study repetitions yield similar answers, and validity, the research's accuracy in representing what is studied. "[S]ocial science has relied almost entirely on techniques for assuring reliability, in part, because 'perfect validity' is not even theoretically attainable" (Kirk and Miller 1986:21). Kirk and Miller (1986) note three types of validity: Apparent validity is the measurement of predetermined correct answers. Instrumental validity involves matching preconceived correct answers and observations. Theoretical validity notes if there is a relationship between theory and observations. In addressing validity, since this thesis had no preconceived answers, it focuses on theoretical validity through constant review of the guiding theoretical questions and the observations garnered from the interviews and comparing them to the existing research on grief and loss.

Assurance of validity comes by "spending prolonged time in the field," "thick description," "clarifying bias," and an "external auditor" (Creswell 2003). By "spending prolonged time in the field," the thesis provides a depth of understanding in the subject, along

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with a detailed account from participants. "Thick description" comes from immersing the reader into the world of the interviewee. Due to the existing rapport between the participants and the researcher, "clarifying bias" was an important aspect conducted through self-reflections. Finally, the use of someone outside the study or an "external auditor" to asses the thesis was used to assure the validity of the study.

<p style="text-align:center">Qualitative Approach to Data Analysis</p>

After reading through the completed transcribed interviews and getting an overall understanding of the data, I noted the emerging themes and divided the data into similar categories. The interviews are coded for the dimensions of loss: Community, Family, Work, Identity, Faith in the System, and Future. Utilizing Wolcott's (1994) description, analysis, and interpretation model, also called the DAI model, the data is systematically examined and discussed.

Wolcott's (1994) text is a guide to going beyond gathering and discussing data into analyzing and interpreting what a researcher uncovers or highlights. Wolcott (1994) notes, "…we must recognize that nothing emerges from qualitative inquiry without considerable assistance on the part of the researcher" (p. 23). In the social world in which participants and researchers exist, he further states everything has potential to be data, but his focus is on what to do with the data and transforming it into something that can be used by a scholar's chosen audience.

Description is the first step in his model, and this deals with the data collection and the first stages of analysis. He notes, "*Description* addresses the question, 'What is going on here?' Data consist of observations made by the researcher and/or reported to the researcher by others" (Wolcott 1994:2). The description of this thesis involves the participant's stories providing and

understanding of their reality post-Katrina which also includes pre-Katrina reflections, this is described through the mediator of evacuation. Included in this section is their experience of loss, as a result, this section answers the question: How is grief expressed from loss? I use Wolcott's concept of "Research or Narrator Order" because it allows for the respondents to tell their own stories, and with those accounts the picture of the area, the people, and the social construction of their world is painted. Thought their interpretation and expression of the world I address the question: What dimensions of loss emerge from the overall experience of loss? The data illustrates the respondent's perspective and is represented through the dimensions of loss.

Second, sorting the material discussed conducts the analysis. Wolcott's (1994) notes, *"Analysis* addresses the identification of essential features and the systematic description of interrelationships among them – in short how things work…." (p. 12). This thesis achieves this by comparing the dimensions of loss to existing literature through what Wolcott calls, "Contextualize in a Broader Analytical Framework." Here I address and answer the research question: "How does the understanding of loss and grief, community members affected by Hurricane Katrina, relate to or add to the existing literature on loss and grief?" A comparison to the literature review elaborates on connections between the dimensions of loss and the understanding of the social world. After the analysis, the interpretation draws inferences about the dimensions of loss and overall social impact through "Connect[ing] with Personal Experience" which involves personal reflections and affectation. "*Interpretation* addresses processual questions of meaning and contexts: 'How does it all mean?' 'What is to be made of it all?'" (Wolcott 1994:12). This is where I answer the main guiding research question: What is the understanding of loss and grief community members form Boothville-Venice, Louisiana experience due to Katrina?

Chapter 5:

FINDINGS

This section describes the pre-Katrina reality of residents, broken into the five dimensions of Community, Work, Family, Identity, and Faith in Systems, and compares them to their post-Katrina realties to discover loss. Then, this thesis relates the loss, and the associated grief, to the existing literature on loss and grief. When this comparison is combined with the knowledge of social construction of socially regulated "lines," 'roles,' and "faces," a pattern of socially constructed loss and grief emerges. It is here that the following thesis question begins to be answered: What is the understanding of loss and grief community members from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana experience due to Katrina?

Social Construct and Loss of Community

As noted, social groups influence the "lines" and "faces" for individuals. The largest social group to which respondents spoke of belonging is their community. The community environment in Boothville-Venice pre-Katrina was a small town atmosphere with most people knowing each other through familial relations. Most families never moved from the area and tend to have family ties going back generations. This close knit area allows for knowledge of other's affairs, and in turn, everyone serves a 'role' in the area which permits the community as a whole to continue to function. An examination of respondents' perceptions of community and relation to it is necessary in understanding how the loss of this community affected residents. In doing this, this thesis focuses on how the community pre-Katrina differs from the community post-Katrina, thus leading to the discovery of the loss due to Katrina. The loss experienced by residents is then compared to the existing literature on loss and grief which leads to a contextual understanding of loss and grief community experienced by Hurricane Katrina.

All respondents mention the difference between the relaxed lifestyle of Boothville-Venice, compared to that of the city's hectic lifestyle. "Hanging out in the neighborhood with all the kids, playing 8-ball, and building camps; we built one in a ditch, and it was so much fun to build," recalls Respondent H of her easy-going life of childhood. Participant K explains her hometown attachment through the people. "Everybody is just so down to earth. Everybody is just easier, and you knew them… and it's like you didn't have to lock your doors. In Venice, everybody knows everybody, and it's just, it's comfort." Respondent K notes that residents did not hesitate to help others in need, and with everyone associating with everyone else it creates a closer knit community. This close knit community also shared the same school which allowed for a local team for the community to support.

Respondent D describes his community through the local school and the gatherings at football games.

> Everybody went to the football games, I even went to the football games, I may not have played football. It was just fun, it was a time you could just hangout with your friends; you know and not have mom and dad looking over your shoulder. Yeah, you would show up with your parents but you would go walk off and hangout with your friends and you know at the end of the day you would come back and get a ride home or tell them you would get a ride from somebody else.

Respondent D recalls that the school's student body count was so low that it shared a football field with another small, public school some miles away, Buras High School. "Actually our home field, we shared with one of our rivals. So, every year we played each other once and every year we flip-flopped it with the home team, so it was kinda fun." With this being the only public school in the Boothville-Venice area, most people, of a similar age, attended school together at one time or another, and as such have had some degree of interaction with everyone.

Respondents N revisits, the notion of everyone knowing everyone. "You know everyone and you're comfortable with the community. You know who all owns every store, every business. That's what we enjoy about it. We enjoy the knowing everyone." Also, due to family closeness, both geographical and relationship, family and community are close entities. "We're just very dependent on 'em. You need something, they're there. Something you're used to. I don't understand people who don't have family around. It's part of life. It's what community's about."

Respondent E also describes his community through the local school from which he graduated. "I liked it, it was very easygoing, [and] it was relaxing. You basically know everyone in the school; it was a small school. They know you. It was much easier to talk to teachers in Boothville than at a big school where you have to wait in line to talk to a teacher or a counselor."

Contrastingly, Respondent B mentions that this community's downside is being narrow minded. She would dissuade her future grandchildren from living in a "…backwater community. They don't have the view points that most people would have, like Lafayette or even Houma. Even Houma, is a backwater community a bit, but they are more open minded."

When Katrina swept through this once tight knit community was scattered and even small groups lost members in the fray of evacuation and after Katrina. Respondent A used the internet to connect with his lost community and also to find his great-grandmother who was moved from a nursing home prior to the storm.

> Plaquemine's had its own little forum, and so, I was able to go there, and even though I didn't know many people there personally because there's several cities of course in Plaquemine's parish. But you could feel such a community bond, you know, just everyone gathering together to try and find family and friends. That's where I found out how to reach my great-grandmother at the church where they brought her. (Respondent A)

There are some respondents who believe that this tight knit community will recombine and form once again. Respondent N discusses her need to return home, and she mentions others she has contact with who regret their decisions to stay where they relocated. Respondent N has faith that others will return to the area, but she notes that patience is what it will take to rebuild the community. "I just recently told my husband about a month ago I was ready to go home. My patience was gone; it was time to go home. I'd have moved in without the power and whatnot. We'll start again. See what happens."

Marris (1975) addresses the relationship between grief and social ties, and the grieving of ones home along with a partial loss of self. Some of the relocated families Marris observed did not realize the attachment they had to their old community and homes in the "slum." As such, when they moved from the community, they experienced grief, but had no idea that it was due to the relationship with their old home and also because they chose to leave. Participant E mentioned life in Venice was easier; people were more approachable. Similarly, Respondent N stated, "You don't meet a stranger down here. You don't have that other places." She continued by contrasting Venice to where her and her family evacuated to for Katrina. "Where I was, I lived there nine months. I don't even know the neighbor's names. We don't live that way here [in Venice]. You know everyone and you are comfortable with the community" (Interviewee N). This comparison surfaced in many accounts, and it represents the loss of community residents faced as they settled in their new homes, be it temporarily or permanently, either way though, the community would never be the same.

The choice to return and rebuild or to relocate presents another community issue of new home acquisition. Meyer (1987), a stress researcher, conducted a project on the stress individuals and families go through when buying a new home. Instead of being overcome with

happiness, her original belief, research shows that these families are often overcome with stress. She claims a new home owner may deal with identity confusion, anxiety, and a sensation of being overwhelmed due the new transitions. Furthermore, along with the already intense amount of stress purchasing a new home causes, families often relocate to a new community, which adds to one's already overwhelmed state (Marris 1975). Katrina victims who experienced this are also adding in the loss of work, identity, and family (which will all be discussed in the findings section) one can see how a large amount of stress develops in a short amount of time. Respondent H relocated following Hurricane Katrina; her and her husband decided to build a new home in an entirely new community. She notes:

> It's been a big adjustment living in Houma, because Houma as compared to Venice, there is no comparison. Here you have all these stores and roads leading in and out, and the people, red lights, we had no red lights. It was quite an adjustment over what I had. I miss our old life – it was easier, simpler.

Marris (1975) addresses the relocation to a new community and the affects it has on the group's social networks; for example, he highlights an unraveling of marriage ties, and the meaning those ties held for the community when his observed community relocated. When families lived in the "slum" they were physically situated close to one another in the neighborhood, and arranged marriages were common and widely supported. He discussed that before the relocation within the community, a husband and wife separating was not widely accepted, so when marriage problems arose in the "slum," they were quickly examined and a solution was found by the group. After the relocation, those ties quickly disappeared. Many of the marriages ended because of lack of community support. One such example from the interviews is Respondent F whose marriage is still under stress after having to relocate away from her previous home and community.

In Boothville-Venice, residents, such as Respondents F and D's family, regularly attended family dinners and other community events; this time was an opportunity for the group to address and assist in problems within each family unit. Many respondents discussed the community support as being one of the appealing factors in living and raising a family in Boothville-Venice.

> It's easy to grow up here. You don't have all the crime. You know everyone. You can actually sit outside at night; you can sit outside and don't have to worry about someone hurting you, hurting your kids. Or your kids wanna go somewhere; you know they're going to be right here in the community. If someone sees 'em do anything they're gonna call you. I like that about the place. One road in, one road out! Small town! Big difference from what other people do, big difference. You don't have crime and drive-by shootings. You know your neighbors. (Interviewee N)

Residents of Boothville-Venice spoke of the comfort in living in the area. Many discussed the reassurance they felt in knowing everyone looked out for each other. Participant K stated that she felt so secure in her community that she did not need to worry about locking her doors. The comfort and close community ties allowed for family gatherings which solidified 'roles' in the group and community as a whole and thus supported the safety of the overall group.

Doka (1989) warns that after relocation, traditional family gatherings can take on an entirely new meaning resulting in less unification of the group and 'roles' no longer being enforced. Culture, history, and any conservation techniques communities devised are lost through displacement and disbursement due to relocation (Shami 1993). As this thesis takes place so close in time to the disaster, many respondents still have loose connections to their previous community. As such, loss of cultural aspects has not been expressed by any respondent. The loss of this community can only be felt by those who participated in the community (Doka 2002). This concept is applicable to relocated communities because many

may view the displaced as being in a better situation than they were prior to the relocation (Marris 1975). Marris (1975) sums up his argument in regards to community grief as a:

> …change not merely their surrounding, but the way they live. A situation is created which resembles bereavement in the sudden and irretrievable nature of the loss, yet provides no process akin to mourning, by which the loss can be assimilated and the essential continuity of life restored. Like death, the moment of transition is so abrupt: the household wakes one mourning in familiar surrounds and by nightfall is gone forever grieving for the dead, all purposes and understanding inherent in those surroundings have to be retrieved and refashioned so that they still make sense of life elsewhere. (P. 61)

Shami (1993) claims environmental reliant communities respond differently than other communities. He argues that communities that move away from reliance on the environment easily assimilate into other communities since the industrialization of products and merchandising makes other such environments more prevalent and a transition to such an environment simple. "…In this [early] phase of adaptation, relocatees are unreceptive to different or new methods or ideas" (Shami 1993:13). Communities which rely on the environment are arguably the most affected by relocation. Respondents E, H, and K all mentioned growing up involved in the fishing industry, and that their present location does not afford that option for work or even recreation. Following Katrina, Participant K, who relocated to Denham Springs, now takes regular trips to Venice with her husband and son, just to see the joy on her son's face when he catches a fish. This act echoes Shami's (1993) idea of being unreceptive to new ideas and holding on to past connections to the environment; Respondent K could have just as easily taken her son to a local park, of which there are many more in her current location, but she and her family are unwavering in that community bond.

Following Hurricane Katrina some chose to return including several of Respondent N's family. After living in a large city similar to Gretna, Louisiana – a city she used to visit when she lived in Venice - for a time she states that she does not want to settle in an area so drastically

different from Boothville-Venice. "Even if I wanted to move, I'd find a small town with no stop light, no big malls, I don't need all that" (Respondent N).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, some relocated individuals accepted moving away from Boothville-Venice for the reason Participant D highlights, "It is not going to go back to the way it was like before the hurricane." This is the statement that demonstrates the loss as being permanent, as even a return to the area includes a lot of change. The community that respondents remember is no longer available to them, having been ripped away by Hurricane Katrina. This loss is only part of the overall loss that residents face since August of 2006. By loosing their community, residents also lose 'roles' and "lines" that they served in the lost "teams." Now, many strive to function in a community that, perhaps, does not understand their situation and loss fully.

In the comparison of pre- and post-Katrina perceptions of community for respondents, the major loss of community is through the disbursement of citizens, the resulting lack of community gatherings, and the destruction of the communal gathering places for the community. Shami (1993) discusses that for those who relocate, whether forced or chosen, there will eventually be a need to assimilate into the new surroundings in order to find a place in this new society and be accepted. He cautions that, when this happens, a disappearance of previous culture begins to take place. For the analysis of this thesis, it is too early to determine whether there is a loss of culture associated with this environmentally reliant community for either of those who relocate or rebuild. This loss affects individuals as their 'roles' in this community are also lost, causing a redefinition of self. This culture is what influenced family lines, so a natural progression is to focus on the change and loss within a family that leads to a redefinition of the "line" and 'roles' involved.

The second largest social group to which residents claimed membership is his or her work. From the interviews discussing work, respondents detail out a pre-Katrina work environment, and when compared to their post-Katrina work, there is noticeable loss due to Hurricane Katrina. Part of the way individual's define themselves, and the 'roles' they serve in a community, is through work. It provides a sense of self worth and another group to belong in the overall social system (Doka 2002). Many residents pre-Katrina linked work with family as some ran family-owned businesses. Along with a sense of accomplishment one gains from work, it provides an income to support one's family, the core group to which he or she belongs (Doka 2002). The loss experienced, and its accompanying grief, when compared to the existing literature on loss and grief, leads to an understanding of the loss and grief associated with meaning attached to work focused on residents of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana.

Respondent C only defined himself through working in Venice with his future in-laws on their family-owned shrimp boat. "I worked in Venice, the only thing that I did was get up from my house to go to work. The place where I was staying to work, come back, get some food at a market, and then go back home. That is all I did, that is all I had time for, I was there specifically to make money and help my relatives, not to live" (Respondent C).

The work environment in Boothville-Venice is mainly blue-collar, commercial fishing and working for, or catering to, the offshore oil industry. Traditional means of employment included citrus farming, commercial fishing, offshore work, and family-owned businesses catering to those other industries. Many residents' livelihoods depend on harvesting the bounty this rich environment provides – fish, shrimp, oysters, crabs, etc., also known as the fisheries industry. Respondent H mentions,

> There was those that lived off the land, and that was their living, and there was
> time that was their living, and there was a time that you could make a very good
> living off the land, very well… We'll I'm speaking right now in terms of
> commercial fishing.

Many interviewees express having a bond with the place that provided their income, and the

community they refer to as home. Host communities, who house the dislocated, are usually

industrial work environments which can handle a large influx of people. The resources in these

areas can support a large group better can an environmentally reliant work environment. This

factor contributes to the reason host communities for the displaced do not always understand the

bond individuals have with the land or the loss community members are facing (Shami 1993).

Along with the stress of being relocated, the dislocated lack the support of their work community

to validate their mourning over the loss of a job. This is understandable as many residents of

Boothville-Venice begin their careers at such a young age.

Some respondents, such as B and D, describe typical local males as not finishing high

school to begin working; conversely, women often marry right out of high school, or in some

cases while still in school. Being a working class area, boys often start work on a family fishing

boat at a young age during school breaks. They are trained to be proficient deck hands with the

knowledge base that will eventually allow them to captain a boat. Some, finding that there is

higher payment in offshore oil work, apply for positions right out of high school, at times not

even graduating. Respondent D provides an effective summary:

> After graduation, if you decided not to go to college, the types of jobs you could
> get in the area, if you weren't planning on leaving, were working for an oil
> company, a welding company, or for a helicopter company to bring workers out
> to the rig, or on a boat as a deck hand, or maybe you were hoping to get a
> captain's license and get your own boat. So you're limited to the fact that it's
> offshore or commercial fishermen, or you were a grunt in a sweaty job outside in
> a hundred degree temperature in the summer. (Respondent D)

Other respondents mentioned moving to Venice specifically for employment. Boothville-Venice ferries local residents and others from more northern cities via boat or helicopter to offshore locations. Respondent K, an at-home business owner, student and homemaker, discusses the importance of boats in the way of life for some residents. "The boats provided people's income; they're all shrimping and oysters and crabbing. That's what puts food on the table, pays people's bills, and provides their way of life. It was providing ours."

Respondent N also did not work outside the home, not until her children were older. "I waited until they were all out of school. Why should I pay other people's children to stay home with my kids? Once they were in school, I went to work and that's where I worked at for 11 years." When Respondent H and her husband wed, he worked out of Venice in the family tug boat business, fourteen days on a tug boat and seven days inland, or 14&7. This is similar to her father's job working 7&7 which allowed him to be home more than her husband. Of her work life, Respondent H explains, "[Her husband] had the tugboat company, I worked there 40 hours a week and made very good money, so I had no desire to go to college or go further." After her son was born and old enough to go to school, around the same time the tug boat business began to suffer, Respondent H worked during school hours, in her words, "this was a convenience" since her husband was working 14&7 and she needed to be home with her son when he was young. Later, Respondent H attended night college classes because,

> I figured that was a good time to go back because he [her son] could pretty well handle himself. I went back just because I wanted more in my life. In fact, we graduated two days apart. I graduated Monday [from college] and he graduated the following Wednesday from high school, and once I did that, I didn't have no particular goals in mind, where I was going with my education, I just wanted some kind of degree that was further.

Work is so important to this family that, when Katrina hit, Respondent H's husband was at work on the water captaining a tug boat, a necessity of his job. This resulted in a loss of communication and much unnecessary trauma for Respondent H and her son, Respondent A.

For the majority of her life, childhood into marriage, Respondent F was a homemaker. It was not until later in life that she acquired a steady career at the local school board. When Katrina hit, she temporarily lost her school board job. Respondent F discussed her struggle following Katrina in keeping her position with the Plaquemines Parish School Board. She and her family needed an income; her husband was unable to work until after his surgery.

> So, once we realized everybody is settled, we've got a routine going. Okay now it's a dilemma. He [her husband] is out of work, I am out of work, don't know when the insurance is gonna pay up. We have such and such amount of money in the bank it's not going to last forever. (Interviewee F)

In order for her to keep her job, she commuted from her relocation city, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to Bellechase, or Port Sulpher, five days a week, from October to January. This is because her view was that there was no other alternative. This difficult task supports Enarson's (2006) early prediction that, following Katrina, many will work twice as hard as before the storm to regain a sense of normality by working double-time and traveling extensive distances. In reference to work, Interviewee F states, "I guess that was my way of getting back into some kind of normalcy." She also points out the difficulty of that decision because even on the weekends she worked her other job as a homemaker. She is extremely close to her children and two grandchildren who live with her. She states that her biggest regret is losing time with them, "Most of the time, by the time I got home, they were ready to go to bed" (Interviewee F) because when she was not at work she was traveling to and from her new home.

> I made the best of the time I had. But, on the weekends, it was left up to me to cook, to clean, to chase the kids, and again no time to spend with them. I wouldn't even get to see them in the morning, the only time I would see them was like

thirty minutes before they would go to bed at night, and that was it. That is the one thing I have always had with my kids, even if it was only an hour or two in the evening or a little time in the morning or a little time in the evening then, when was not working, at home as a homemaker.

She took pride in her homemaker 'role' and the "faces" of mother and grandmother. However, following Hurricane Katrina, even that job was compromised as she fought to keep her wage earning position. Post-Katrina many jobs were affected and in some places completely lost leaving many entirely without a means of employment. As a result, families from the Boothville-Venice combined to survive. Respondent A notes that, "Afterwards, [post-Katrina] chipping in, if one family member doesn't have much money. Picking up the slack and paying to help get the food and everything. They would take turns to take care of them and everything."

Others who relied on the resources of that environment were affected because the environment and resource availability changed so drastically. In addition, the equipment of this industry, mainly boats, had to be located and repaired or replaced entirely before anyone could continue harvesting the bounty of the sea. Respondent E articulates the process for a commercial fisheries family who rely on their boat for everything.

> Basically it was a waiting game to see what happened. Everybody in commercial fishing was worried about their boat, their only source of income. So the people lost a lot that lost a boat. That's what they use to make a living, trawling, fishing. People lose their house, you know, they can still make money. If you lose the boat, they have nothin' to do to make money, if they can't make money their gonna lose their house anyway. They couldn't get insurance on the boat. My family was not really concerned about the house. They were concerned about their boat more. They basically lived on that boat most of their lives, this was for them, not having a house, the house was only for the kids, mainly. They were one of the few fortunate people that the boat sustained no or very little damage. It was on top of the trees; they found it in a tree. The tree held it without moving. So that was the good thing. a $15,000 rig just floating in the water, it was way inside like a forest area and they had cleared a whole entire tree out and then got the boat out and put it in the water. It was about $5,000 repair damage, but the majority of it was putting the boat back in the water. They were happy as hell when they saw that the boat was sitting up in a tree. Basically, as soon as they get the boat back in the water, they can work. That time was the beginning of trawling season, so

they were most interested in getting the boat back in the water and going trawling again as soon as they can. There in the few months they couldn't trawl, for a few months, they lost $50,000 in a few months, nowhere near the aid given.

As demonstrated above, the small community of Boothville-Venice models the overall American culture's view on the importance of work. Doka (2002) argues that industries are powerful in this country and assist in determining policies and laws. It is only logical to assume major implications will be present in the workplace because work consumes so much of people's lives and their placement in the world. A detrimental factor of environmentally reliant communities is loss of employment because community members require a particular environment to ply their trade and perform their tasks (Shami 1993). The loss of employment for residents of Boothville-Venice is more than just a lost job; it is a loss of a means of survival, stability for their family, and a defining factor of personal identity. Katrina compromised many jobs in the area of Boothville-Venice; businesses, produce, and boats were destroyed. Respondent N notes a response to this loss that she observed,

> I guess when everyone realized what happened, it was kind of like every man for himself. Some people, when this area was destroyed, they lost their jobs. Especially if they were fishermen and their jobs was out here [in Venice]. You had to get out there and people had to say ok, what are we gonna do. A husband had to go find [a] job or find [a] house.

Boothville-Venice's ability to bounce back after Katrina is impacted by community member's attachment to place and those groups having a means to survive after Katrina. A means of income determines factors in returning to a community. Many residents main concern after their family was not necessarily their homes but the boats. Participant E explains through the experience of his family.

> Everything was okay, the boat had stayed over the water… They were happy as hell when they saw that the boat was sitting up in a tree. Basically, as soon as they get the boat back in the water, they can begin the trawling season, so they

were most interested in getting the boat back in the water and going trawling again as soon as they can. (Interviewee E)

During this account, responded E continues by explaining that a boat is not only a means of employment, but a resource that provides shelter until one can rebuild a home.

Whereas some families returned to their careers if they could, some viewed Katrina as an opportunity to find new and different work to support their families. G decided, "I was going to do what I always wanted to do, which was become a teacher." Respondent K also wishes to return to school, once the situation after Katrina settles down.

At the time of Katrina, Participant M attended graduate school and lived with her sister, Respondent B, who began college in the fall of 2005. Her husband was not raised in Boothville, but rather in a similar, coastal–lying area. He did, however, work out of Venice as a commercial shrimper at the time of Katrina. He is no longer able to work this job due to the loss of the boat he worked.

The loss of employment, temporary or permanent, affects a person as a loss of 'roles' and income. By comparing pre- and post-Katrina situation of work for respondents, the loss of work develops as respondents are removed from an environment where they can apply their trade, either temporarily or permanently. As the means of making this living was passed down from generation to generation this might be considered more profound. This means that the bond with their work was forged from childhood, with teachings from a verity of family members. The loss of such strong bonds can cause a person to address his or her 'role' in life and even to question his or her identity because not only or relationships form in the work environment, but stability and self worth. This loss affects people on the individual level as their 'roles' at work are also lost, causing a redefinition of self. However, such as the other dimensions of loss this is not the only aspect of reality lost to respondents.

The smallest, yet most influential, social group to which residents belong is the family. Construction and reaffirmation of one's identity lies mostly in the family. 'The stronger the family, the stronger one's personal identity' is an idea which shaped Weigert and Hasting's (1977) study; they note that the most powerful and painful loss happens within the family. It is here, in the family, that most residents focused their discussions both pre- and post-Katrina. Life pre-Katrina in Boothville-Venice is made up of generations of tight, family bonds with families living in close proximity, and in some cases, across a yard from one another, or others under the same roof. Families also work together, such as in the fisheries industry, often with fathers passing on their trade and family business to sons and sons-in-law who remain in the area. This geographical relationship closeness provides a security for each sibling and their families. When comparing this family situation to the situation post-Katrina, a loss of family emerges, and when cross-referenced with the existing research on loss and grief, an understanding of the loss and grief of family associated with Hurricane Katrina emerges.

Respondent D describes his family as close and never moving far away from each other. "It would mean uprooting from history, my father grew up there, his parents grew up in the area. Our family had been in the area for so long." Those who happen to leave the area return often to see their families during breaks from college or work, and to help evacuate when necessary because family bonds are so strong in this area. As family comprised most of the respondents' interviews, it is necessary to allow focus on their pre- and post-Katrina family environments to flow from their words before examining their losses to this group post-Katrina.

Respondent H, a resident of Boothville-Venice for the entirety of her life, describes her childhood family.

My mother was a homemaker, she was always there, and always had the dinner ready, the house cleaned, someone always there. My father worked for Giddy Oil Company, and each time they came back because that's what his work was. He was home every night, he had his regular schedule, get up at 5 o'clock in the morning, go to work, by six o'clock in the evening he was home; he'd be in bed by 11, working for the company my family never lacked for anything, was always well taken-care of, and I enjoyed having my father home every night.

Years after she started her own family, her parents decided to move from the area to North Louisiana. However, the move did not last long because they wanted to be closer to their children, grandchildren, and other extended family members as Respondent H's father became ill. Returning to Venice reaffirmed family ties and 'roles' in the entire family unit. That chosen relocation is contrasted by Katrina which forced a separation in the family. Respondent H's immediate family consists of her husband who, like her father, worked away from home, and her son whom she raised on her own. Her son, Respondent A, left for college, but returned regularly to Boothville-Venice to visits due to his familial closeness.

Respondent L recalls life with her husband and their ten children. "You had the love and the companionship of everybody. My husband was strict with the children, I was more lenient. We didn't have any trouble with our children, and they've all grown up to be fine people." This large family setting lead to closeness of her family's living arrangements after her children left to start their own families. She even has one child who lived far away, but he visited every week because his work brought him close. During her interview, she recalls years of family gatherings at different relatives' homes and the joy of seeing her family together as it grew.

Respondent F defines home as "…where family is. I mean Boothville will always be home 'cause it was where we were raised and where we came from. But home is where you make it; it's what you make it. If it is in an apartment somewhere, then that's home, if it's in a hotel room then that's home, you know it's where your family is." She is close to her own

family, but she is distanced from her extended family as her husband, and consequently her, chose his side of the family to visit when available. Respondent F states that her husband's family took precedence over her own.

> My birth family they're all up here [Belle Chase]. And for different reasons in the marriage, I haven't exactly been able to be close to my family. My family didn't exist. If it came down to his family had something going on, my family had something going on the same day he would say we had to go to his. It's his way!

However, after Katrina, the close proximity to her extended family provided an opportunity to reestablish bonds with them. This, along with a new perspective of herself, influenced her decision to live in Bell Chase for one to two years.

The importance of family gatherings resurfaced in Respondent N's interview as she recalls family gatherings pre-Katrina. "Everyone was there. We normally all get together for the holiday. If we had the family close, your friends close, most of us were used to being with family. I prefer it. It makes it a lot easier." Respondent N's family was so close that they evacuated as a family unit. "We all leave together as a family so if someone's stuck at work we wait. It just accelerated when the storm got to 165mph wind and did not begin turning, we left. You don't think about your stuff." Due to Katrina, this physical closeness has changed. "My mom has seven daughters, and she had one son. All but two of the daughters live down this way. Most of them are in downstate [south of Northern Louisiana, but not Boothville-Venice] now, they're considering going back [to Boothville-Venice]."

Respondent D explains that, though his family pre-Katrina was not perfect, they were close.

> Yeah, it got kinda testy. I mean, family is family. You love your family. They're always there for you no matter how much you fight with them. But you still fight with them, and I mean when you're put in a situation where your always broke (and money is always an issue with fights). Money strain, temperature strain, your always putting people down. Always opposite. Release, gather, always one

thing against another, its causes just so much conflict, that there is a strain. So like I said, it's family. You get in a fight you get over it eventually. (Respondent D)

The family struggles continued post-Katrina, but struggles have settled some for Respondent D and family closeness reestablishes more everyday. As such, these close families are visiting each other and gathering again.

Respondent E grew up with his extended family all under one roof. His grandmother raised him while his parents were commercial fishing, a time consuming task which kept them away most of the time. "Yeah, I don't really see my parents that much, they're always offshore. I lived at home with my grandma, she took care of us, my brothers and my sisters and my cousins, we have a big family." Respondent E was accustomed to a lot of people around him; however, Katrina pushed the limits of his tolerance. He lists those under one roof post-Katrina as,

My mother, my dad, my grandma, my brother, his girlfriend, my sister and her husband, their baby, the neighbors, and then my uncle, his mom, his wife and their two kids. They had fifteen people, it was crazy. My room had five people in there and only one bathroom, so it was very, very rough for the one month period that they were here.

Even though resources were low, Respondent E was still "there for his family," a sentiment echoed in many respondents' interviews.

Respondent M and Respondent B's family settled the area of Boothville-Venice generations ago and has been in the area ever since. Respondent M details her relationship with her father and siblings.

I helped my ailing father and mother raise my younger siblings until my departure to Lafayette, Louisiana in 2002, and my sister [Respondent B] took over. I rarely had time for other interests as family was the most important. My three siblings are like my own children; we are all roughly five years apart in age. My role was so much more than a mere babysitter; I made Halloween costumes, helped with homework, attended almost all school functions, went to doctor's visits, and every other parenting task too numerous to detail here.

Family plays an important role in the community of Boothville-Venice. This presence of family and the 'roles' and bonds it provides presents sets the stage to understand what respondents had and then lost due to Hurricane Katrina.

Campbell and Demi (2000) discuss what loss and grief of family is and how individuals and groups understand and create meaning. The authors discuss the loss of a father and the added trauma, due to the uncertainty of having an MIA parent, on the interviewee's lives and how that stress affects grief. The discussion of the personal dealings through life and into adulthood with unresolved grief illustrates an individual account of grief and loss. The loss of a family member, though not through death, happened to Participant H whose grandmother was in a nursing home at the time of Hurricane Katrina. The home did not inform the families of the location to which the evacuated elderly went, so Interviewees H and A's family was wracked with concern for her well-being especially with the news coverage of the elderly being left in some nursing homes. By using the internet, "I was able to find out where they took them. I was able to find her and tell my papa so he was very relieved to find out where his mother was, as was the rest of the family" (Interviewee A).A further strain placed on this family was the lost connection with his father for a time during and after-Katrina. This was due to his father working on the water as a tug boat Captain at the time of impact. "We couldn't get a hold to my dad like the day after, and luckily I was finally able to get through and talk to him. The only time I was able to get through in the next couple days. And I was able to tell my mom and everyone that he was ok." These temporary losses of family members may not seem detrimental, but in the turmoil of the aftermath of Katrina, respondents worlds were torn from them, and all many of them had was family.

The loss of a family member does not only refer to the loss of human life, but other species as well. Gage and Holcomb (1991) found that forty percent of the respondents compared the death of their pet to the death of a relative or friend. Interviewee's H, A, and K all point out that pets are important to their family units, so much so that in a three bedroom home housing thirteen family members, there were so animals that they out-numbered the humans when they evacuated for Katrina. Gage and Holcomb (1991) explained the death of a family member to be highest stress causing loss because they hold the most significant attachments of all relationships. The authors surveyed 1,650 families – defining family as a husband, a wife, and at least one child – then examined stress resulting from the loss of a pet. They argue that a family pet maintains a role in the family unit; in fact, some couples view their pets as their children. "My pet's is like family, you know, they are a part of the family" (Interviewee K). Gage and Holcomb (1991) claim that, depending on the individual and the family, the loss of a pet may be an extremely traumatic experience resulting from attachment to the pet. When Interviewees H and K evacuated for Katrina, they never considered leaving their pets. Respondent H mentions loading pets into her car first, and fitting other items around them. When Participant K discussed evacuating, she said, "And you just look and see what you value the most to get it in; beside you, husband, son, we grabbed our animals and whatever else could fit."

Another evacuation situation that was low on space resources post-Katrina was Respondent E's family at his apartment. He and his family evacuated together to his residence in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (he was maintaining residents in Boothville and Baton Rouge at the time of Katrina.) "My mother, my dad, my grandma, my brother, his girlfriend, my sister and her husband, their baby, the neighbors, and then my uncle, his mom, his wife, and their two kids.

They had fifteen people." He continues to discuss that it was hard especially with "only one bathroom," but being there for family is what must be done.

After the family was located and connected again, the reality of their return become less feasible, so the family begin settling where they could, which was not as close as before. Marris (1975) examines the loss and grief individuals' experience by addressing relocation, a typically overlooked area which impacts individuals and groups deeply. Marris notes loss can come in many forms, but it often leads to grief. The analysis of a "slum" clearance in Boston developed from reflections of previous work and years of observations on the East End of London. He claims grief is the result of change, and studies meaningful patterns of loss which lead to bereavement. For the application of this study, I use his examination on changes families and communities face when they are made to relocate. In the section "Slum Clearance" (p.48) he explains how some experience grief immediately after the relocation and others showed signs of grief later. There were families who were extremely excited to be moving out of the "slums," so they could get into a better neighborhood, have a better life for their families, or simply for the change of a new home. Then, what were originally feelings of excitement and happiness changed into feelings of loss and grief. Gage and Holcomb (1991) acknowledge that society establishes the recognition of loss related stress, and the experience of a loss may be more upsetting if it is not recognized in their community. Within this Boston community some were happy to have relocated, others were not, and some were unaffected emotionally until months following the move. After the relocation of the "slum" community, ties began to unravel and the 'roles' individuals held in a community became 'roles' only existing in their individual household (Marris 1975). Participant H responds to this separation:

> I don't like it. I don't like it at all! I enjoyed having my family close to me.
> We're a close family. I loved having my mom and dad in the yard with me. My

niece lived two miles from me. Now, I don't like it at all because I got used to seeing my parents everyday, and my niece, and their kids. I enjoyed their children, I love them and I enjoy being with them. So, I miss them a lot!

Mirroring Respondents H's feelings, Respondents K and Kk both feel disconnected from their families due to the disbursement which took place after Katrina.

Since the storm we're so scatted. My grandma is in Marksville. My Aunt's in Houma. My mom's in Bellechase. My sister is in Marrero. That bothers me 'cause we were all right there, and it was always like that. We grew up close with each other and now it is like the most you see of each other is maybe once every couple of months.

In contrast to the above experience involving forced disbursement, some respondents chose to be separated from their families as situations post-Katrina weakened family bonds. Marris's (1975) text, discusses the breakdown of family support systems due to family members being separated due to relocation. Interviewee B faced a difficult decision following Katrina of choosing between family ties which included help or relocation.

They [my parents] wanted me to help them in order for them to help me. And in order for me to help them I had to go back to a place I didn't want to go back to…. I know that he [her father] would need help and I wouldn't have mind sticking around them, helping them, if they had relocated like everyone else, like they had planned to do. But then they decided to pack up and go back to Boothville to rebuild the home that I grew up in. But I didn't want to go back there, and they were basically well if you don't want to go back then there's nothing we can really do for you. And they left.

Respondent F, mother of D, also recalls the strife. In her son's household, as a result of her husband's overwhelming need to control his son's home and differing viewpoints compromised the family support system, bonds, and 'roles.' Respondent D, knowing what his father is like, "just got tired of it and decided enough was enough. He didn't want it in his house anymore. So he told him to leave." Their lives continued while he was gone, moving from one relatives home to another until Respondent F's eventual relocation to her FEMA trailer. Her husband reentered her household when she received a FEMA trailer in Bellechase which allowed her to stop

commuting. Respondent F comments on allowing him to return, "Why I did it, I don't know! I felt sorry that he did not have a place to stay." As far as the decision to return to Boothville-Venice, she notes, "The return to Venice is still up in the air. I guess it's going to depend on if the family stays together." Due to changes in the 'roles' and "line" of her family, Respondent F has not decided as of yet if her family will end in divorce as Katrina served as a catalyst to already latent issues. Respondent F's son, Respondent D, speaks on the disbursement of his family when he had to evict his father. He states, "It killed me a bit inside. I took a shot of something just to get the nerves to do it. It was really hard for me for the next couple of days. It hurt a lot, and now thinking back on it, it hurts."

Marris (1975) claims family ties are reinforced by being in close proximity of one another, so bonds begin to breakdown after prolonged separation, as with community relocation. Ten months following Katrina, Participant D talks about the struggle he and his family experienced in trying to keep bonds strong. Like many other families, Respondent D's relatives were residents for generations. Before the storm, this group lived within minutes of one another.

> Well it's hard because I can't go visit one and not visit them all, and also every year my family holds two family reunions. During the spring they hold a crawfish boil, during the fall they hold a family picnic. This year they held the crawfish boil even though what had happened. But last fall the picnic wasn't held because of the hurricane. When the crawfish boil was held a couple of weeks ago, my mom called me and told me they were having it in the same place, but not too many people were ordering crawfish because the price had gone up and all. We weren't able to go, so I called my mom, and she said that not a lot of people showed up. A lot of its due to the fact that its so far away now. For the people that were affected by the hurricane there's a lot more prepping to worry about and having to drive two or three hours. We can go see everybody, it's worth it but some may not be able to do it. The separation is keeping a lot of family member from coming together like we use to. [Use to] we come together we see each other for the entire day, see how everybody's doing. Now to see how anybodies doing you have to go visit them individually or you can call them and see how everything's going on. There's just so much distance in our family now it's hard get everyone together. (Respondent D)

Family strife also took place in Respondent M's family due to her decision not to return to Boothville-Venice.

> My husband fully supported my decision because he could not imagine returning to work in Boothville-Venice, Louisiana. The choice not to return and rebuild was the first step in inadvertently severing ties with my immediate family. To this day I do not have contact with my father, mother, and two younger brothers. My sister resides in Thibodeaux, Louisiana, also choosing not to return.

The sister she mentions is Respondent B who speaks of the abandonment by her family. "I knew my parents weren't going to be where I went because I knew they wanted to go back home, rebuild their home, a home that would probably be gone next season again. But that's what they wanted, and it's not what I wanted. So I had to start over without them." She speaks of choosing her future life over her family and not returning with them to rebuild and help raise her younger siblings. "I know that he would need help, and I wouldn't have mind sticking around them and helping them if they had relocated like everyone else, like they had planned to do. I wouldn't have mind staying with them and helping them. But they decided to pack up and go back to Boothville." This decision has caused a spilt in the family with Respondent B having no further communication with her family until nearly six months after the storm. Her sister and brother-in-law, respondents M and C respectively, have completely severed ties from all of that family except respondent B.

Weigert and Hasting's (1977) study noted that the most powerful and painful loss happens within the family. The study took shape from the notion of 'the stronger the family, the stronger one's personal identity.' In every relationship you have a self identity, but as your life changes, your identity is reshaped. A number of identities are formed within the family; different relationships and experiences depend on the structure of the family unit (Weigert and Hasting 1977).

In the comparison of pre- and post-Katrina descriptions of family by respondents, the major loss of family which developed was through the disbursement of once tight-knit social groups, the resulting lack of family gatherings, and the destruction of the homes and reaffirming pieces to the past. Not all loss of a person is the result of death; furthermore, loss of a human is not the only family member that people fear losing. Someone can be lost through marriage, a move, or even a disagreement, as mentioned with Respondents M and C's disconnect from their family. Throughout the interview, Participant K spoke of how much she, her husband, and their son missed relatives and their chosen family – friends and colleagues. She discussed how difficult it is not to see everyone, but no one lives within a short driving distance anymore. She mentions that watching her son go through the loss of Katrina is the hardest experience of all for her. Interviewee K notes, "He still asks me today 'mama where is such and such,' and that I don't have an answer for him because I don't know." Loss within the family affects individuals as their 'roles' in the "team" shift or are lost completely causing a need for a redefinition of self. However, family being the most influential "team" for an individual suggests that examination of loss of identity should lead to a more complete understanding of the overall loss cause by Hurricane Katrina.

Social Construct and Loss of Identity

Social groups, to which a person belongs, influence his or her identity. By examining the perceptions of a person on the social groups to which he or she belongs, this thesis can ascertain a perception of self identity for that person. Most respondents identify themselves through their familial roles and relationships first and foremost. Second, work and the accompanying relationships provide another means of identifying one's self. Many women respondents did work outside the home, but when discussing themselves, they spoke more of family ties and

'roles' such as mother, sister, aunt, and grandmother. Males, however, defined themselves through their occupational 'roles', usually life-long, before speaking of family.

Once the pre-Katrina perception is present, a comparison of it to the post-Katrina self-perception reveals the loss of self. This loss of self, when compared to the existing research, develops a comprehension of the loss and grief of identity but is specific to members of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana. For example, in examining the social construction of identity, Weigert and Hasting's (1977) work focuses on identity loss due to relationship loss. They explain that humans have a number of different identities; for example, the identity as a child, the identity with a life partner, the identity as a parent, etc.

Over time, one's family defines a person's reality and self identity in addition to the shaping that takes place due to different individual identities constantly being projected onto one another. Three divisions are made in this section the loss of markers of life, identity confusion, and loss of 'roles'. Though respondents identified themselves through community, work, and family, I chose to separate this as a dimension of loss because the loss they experienced is not only expressed externally through mourning, it is grieved internally and their experiences required a re-identification and redefinition of self. Furthermore, along with the social construction of self identity, I recognized the symbolic interactionism perspective that the individual and his or her social group cannot be separated, thus without the understanding of individual loss the other dimensions are incomplete.

Interviewee H identifies herself as a daughter, wife, mother, and Christian. Raised in Venice, Louisiana, she spoke of family much during the interview. Respondent H says of herself, "I got married June 23, 1978, right out of high school. I graduated in May, I got married in June, and I turned 18 in September, and my first child was born February 13th 1982."

Throughout her interview she recalls always having family close to her. Their lives were highly integrated they vacationed together, and they even evacuated as a family unit from hurricanes. In Respondent H's 45 years of life, evacuation was a regular occurrence, and she recalls few times where she did not evacuate from storm. During her interview she details the similarities between those past evacuations and Katrina's, but acknowledges that, though she evacuated such as she always done, the evacuation for Katrina was different. She is not returning to Boothville-Venice, and she relays her story through discussing the experience of evacuating.

Interviewee H's son, Respondent A, defines himself in reference to his connection with his hometown and family, and his moving away for college and work in Lafayette, Louisiana. Participant A notes, "I have only lived in Venice, other than when I left to go to college, but I still went back to Venice. I mean I didn't only live at my college, I'd go back [to Venice] for a certain periods of the year." This differs from Interviewee K's choice to commute to and from school.

Interviewee K defines herself through motherhood, her education, and the tangible connections to her lineage; she is the niece of Respondent H and cousin of Respondent A. She outlines her life as follows: "I graduated from Boothville High School in '94. And I got married the same year in October, and then I had my son in April of '98. And then after I had him I decide to go back to school to get my Associates degree which I received in May '05, right before the Hurricane." She received her Associates from Nunez Community College, the same institution her aunt, Interviewee H received hers. Respondent K identifies with Venice which affected her choice to remain close to home for school, "It [the area] was everything we've known as far as making a living, starting out, it was where we started at, and I thought that was where we would finish at, but it's not."

In contrast, Respondent L's self perception of, "I can live anywhere. I can adjust, but then I am not a person that drives around, so I am a homebody. I don't go places, I like to be home," highlights her life. Throughout her interview, she defines herself as a mother, a caretaker, and a wife. Her immediate family consists of ten children, twenty-eight grandchildren, and eleven, or twelve, great-grandchildren, she's unsure. Being a homebody, she prefers others to visit her rather than to go out visiting. She never learned to drive, claiming her "husband always did." As such, she stayed home while raising her family. She began each day with preparing the children for school. After seeing them to the bus, she began the chores of maintaining the household for such a large family. This included caring for the family garden and animals, both pet and livestock; all necessities of life when feeding twelve people on one person's income.

Respondent B spent much time at home, and of her childhood, B relates, "When I was younger, we didn't have much, I mean I had a good life, but there was times when you wanted that one thing, and you couldn't get it." She discusses much of her childhood and adolescents as, "I basically took care of my two little brothers most of the time. I took care of the house. From twelve years up I was basically the stereotypical house wife, though I wasn't married and I didn't have my own kids, but I classified my two little brothers as my own kids sometimes. Because I know I took care of them most of their lives." When she became older, Respondent B did not want to fit into the typical 'roles' of female of Boothville-Venice, a social reality of which she was well aware. Participant B notes, "The typical girl in Boothville, if they graduated, would just get married and have kids, stay home and take care of the house, I wasn't going to be that stereotypical girl."

Many respondents express grief or social manifestation of mourning in their discussion of loss. Most note a noticeable difference between their pre-Katrina and post-Katrina selves. The questioning of personal 'roles' and the "faces" he or she projects in his or her "team" happened when Hurricane Katrina devastated their community and lives, this lead to confusion in themselves which affected the "teams" as a whole. Some mention a time of numbness to the world, disconnection, or lack of memory of the events following Katrina. Others list countless items they owned and lost due to Katrina, items they not only were attached to but they saw as representing them in the world. Some mention a longing for the lives they once knew and a comparison to the expected lives ahead of them.

Respondent H misses her life and 'roles' in Venice, but she tries to take a positive outlook on her life post-Katrina.

> In spite of it, you know, I think it's getting better now. But what I miss more than anything was my life. It was much simpler. My job was only one mile from my home. And I had my home. I didn't have to go through all this paperwork. The constant thinking everything we have to replace, every single thing.

Respondent H lost many items she collected from her family over the years. Her grandmother's "old time wash bowl," another grandmother's sewing table, and a violin given to her son, Respondent A, which belonged to his great-great-grandfather. "My possessions are lost, and there are some things I lost that can never be replaced, but I had nowhere to put it. I had no choice. Those kinds of things you can't replace."

Loss of physical markers of life compromise, one's identity because they denote concrete representations of self. Respondents spoke of family records such as photo albums, birth certificates, childhood drawings and projects, and generational items passed down in the family. Participant K first and foremost identified herself as a mother; during the interview she spoke at great lengths about how fortunate she considers herself to have her son because she did not know

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if she could bear children. In fact, most difficult loss, to her, was the losses he son experienced. She expressed tremendous regret in not double checking for his baby videos when they evacuated. Proof of one's identity exists in shared memories and family archives which can be socially seen and shared. These physical pieces of life confirm one's self identification and classify a person to others; for example, an interviewee mentioned loss of wedding photos that mark as proof to others that she is married (Weigert and Hasting 1977).

Items mark one's identity by being tangible parts of the past which include homes as well as the items within. Participant L returned from evacuation to rebuild after a number of devastating storms, and she relayed the process of evacuating as if she was reciting any typical to-do list. However, through tears of sadness she spoke of the hard decision of choosing between "my children's records, stuff that I wanted, things that they did as children, but it wasn't as important as some other things so I left those." Even though saddened by the loss of those items, Participant L focuses on the need to face the present. "I feel like today is today. You do what you have to do today, and you just you don't worry about yesterday. You have to just keep going." She does not forget about the past, but rather remembers and carries these treasures with her through her daily life.

For Interviewee H, almost every physical marker of her life remained in Boothville-Venice, Louisiana for Katrina. Born and raised as her parents were in this community, she brought up her son in Venice, and hoped to spend the rest of her life there. Her and her husband bought the house she grew up in and raised their son there. Hurricane Katrina destroyed her home and almost all of her belongings. Due to her husband being away at work and only possessing one small car, she spoke of the lack of choice but to take only the bare necessities. When she returned to Venice after the storm she hoped to be able to recover some of her past.

Physical markers of ones' life reaffirmation to the world that one exists, photos, family heirlooms, report cards, and the like all document ones identity and the 'roles' he or she plays in a social group (Weigert and Hasting 1977). A photo of a family represents more than something that hangs on a wall; it shows how each person fills a space and a 'role' in that group. A report card represents one's classification in education. A family heirlooms carries a history long before the one who owns it at present, but also states being a part of a later family members history.

In discussing Interviewee H's life in Venice and the regret she experiences in leaving some representation of her and her family life, this led her to examine her state of mind post-Katrina.

> I did start getting really down, and I did sometimes catch myself thinking about and getting depressed and then I try and think, well, you have a lot to be thankful for. Personally I actually think I tended to depression. Maybe because I held everything in, I'm not sure, I just know that all too often I would just find myself in a stare. Just real quiet. Just not like before. Sittin' by the television in there with everyone watching television, and my mind's not even on the television. You know what my mind was thinking? I can't tell you. It was like it was just blank. It was just blank. I didn't want to do anything. I didn't want to do absolutely nothing. There were times I didn't want to get out of bed. I didn't want to. What am I going to get out of bed for? And personally I didn't want anyone to know what I was truly feeling. I didn't want anyone to know how I really felt about it. I didn't complain about it to others. I didn't poor-mouth myself like other people did. But knew I had to move on, you know, so I did.

Respondent H's son, Participant A, relates his recollection of his life in the weeks following Katrina.

> I still see the images in my head; there was a period of two weeks where after the storm where I was just numb, I could not process anything, in my head I was just overwhelmed. I guess, in shock from everything that I read online. All the pictures people posted on the forums. I guess it just took its toll on me and even though I went to class for those two weeks I honestly couldn't tell you what I did in them. I was just there in body.

Following Hurricane Katrina, many discuss an understanding of changing self or not being themselves. Participant B remembers well the days after Katrina speaking of the overwhelming amount of information and circumstance of loosing two homes, a new school, and wanting more time to digest this overload. She mentions the depression of facing the reality of starting over again after just starting a new life two weeks prior.

Some spoke of a conscious awareness of not being themselves following Katrina. "I just know that all too often I would just find myself in a stare. Just real quiet. Just not like before (Interviewee H)". Other participants note a kind of disconnected experience from self and the social world around them. Respondent J discusses:

> It's kinda of a blur to me because it kind of went by fast. It's like I don't remember how I got there, all I know is it got done and it's behind me. I'm glad it got done and I got through it. I have no idea how I did it.

These participants discuss their identity post-Katrina by comparing the way they recognize self pre-Katrina. Goffman (1959) claims, one may put forth a number of different identities or "faces" depending on the social setting or "line" they are in. In comparison of self post-Katrina of self pre-Katrina, respondents noticed a difference, and in some cases, loss of aspects of identity. In Goffman's concept of identity formation, identity develops over time through relationships with other members of the family. This evolution takes place naturally with the transitions of life; for example, as a child you have parents, when you get older you may become a parent which leads to redefinition of 'roles' within older relationships. Respondents mention being in functioning 'roles' as members of the community of Boothville and Venice. So, when separation from these community 'roles' took place, identity confusion resulted.

Interviewee H notes a disconnect from her normal self following Katrina and struggling with living up to the 'roles' she played because her husband worked 14&7, leaving her to handle most of the family affairs. She notes:

> I never cried. Through it all, I never cried. At times it felt like I wanted to cry, I couldn't cry because there were people around me, and I'm not a person to cry in front of others. It's not that I'm ashamed. I don't know what you want to call it. I just I always felt like I had to be one of the strong ones.

The definition of self or identity confusion is due to traumatic events such as devastating storms. Erikson (1995) discusses how trauma can create a new community encompassing the affected, and prompt a large part of one's self to withdraw. Erikson defines individual trauma as, "'…a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively'" (p. 187). An event may be so sudden and traumatic that one's reaction to life or understanding of self may change entirely. Participant D stated, "There were some nights where it looked like it wasn't going to get better at all, and then there was some nights where you just wanted to crawl and curl up in a corner and give up."

Gibson (n.d.) claims the most common effect individuals experience due to post-disaster trauma is posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which often results in depression from the experience of overwhelming circumstances. Participant B relays her experience following Katrina as:

> Depression, [there was] a lot for me. The reality of it was my home both of them was gone, that my school was gone, and that I would have to find a new life somewhere else. There were points when I just wished time and everything would just stop. So that maybe I could get a hold on everything that was going on. There were things I didn't understand I didn't grasp the reality of it. When I finally grasped the concept and accepted that both my homes where gone, there was nothing left to go back to, that I would have to move to a new location, build a home in that location, and find new schooling else where. And I knew it, that it was something that I knew I had to do and I knew my parents weren't going to be there because I knew they wanted to go back home, rebuild their home, a home

that would probably be gone next season again. But that's what they wanted and it's not what I wanted. So I had to start over without them.

Thus, not only does this respondent experience a loss of self due to the trauma of Katrina, she points out the loss of her familial roles. Gibson (n.d.) mentions the personal effects of PTSD may result in conflict within the family unit. Goffman (1959) claims, when one's identity changes it threatens the identity of other members in the group because each individual is a part of another's self identification.

In the comparison of pre- and post-Katrina norms of actions and responses, respondents described a noticeable change in identity due to the loss of other aspects of their social lives. In following the guide symbolic interactionism puts forth, this reaffirms that the identity, and thus loss of identity, is socially constructed. In comparing this to the existing research on loss and grief, respondents fell into patterns of grief and mourning post-Katrina due to their reality being torn from them. This leads many to redefinitions of self, and as a result, reality. When a relationship changes or a person no longer is physically present in the group, one may wonder whether the identity they had with that member is still valid and whether the 'role' they served in the relationship still exists (Brabant 1996; Goffman 1959). Erikson (1995) discusses a group's collective trauma caused by a disaster can result in a breakdown of elements, 'roles' and "lines," that hold groups together and a direct consequence for an individual is a loss of self and place in the group. Examined though the social networks to which each claimed membership, two other aspects of the social world which relationships existed within a hierarchical system and the Future are discussed as well. These relationships, though categorized as non-traditional, affected their decisions post-Katrina, and subsequently, their future interpretations of reality.

Social Construct and Loss of Faith in Systems

A person's faith in the system to which he or she belongs is shaped by the social perceptions around him. Expected actions prompt associated corresponding reactions, and when the actions occur without the reactions following, the faith in the system can be shaken or lost. Such was the case for some resident of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana. By comparing some expected reactions with what happened (or rather did not happen) after Katrina, this thesis reveals a basis by which some residents lost their faith in the system. It is important to note this loss of faith because many respondents discussed systems such as the media and recovery aid in the context of loss and many are redefining past views and basing future decisions on their current mindset. This loss, when compared to the existing literature on loss and grief, develops an understanding of the loss and grief associated with faith in the system for some respondents.

When disaster strikes, aid can often be found soon thereafter, however, this expected assistance and information was remiss in attendance after Katrina for many respondents of this thesis. From the beginning, when Katrina first made landfall, many residents loss faith in systems they thought that they could rely on. All respondents stated they were not able to receive any information on Lower Plaquemine from the media. "The media didn't even talk about Venice. Not once" (Interviewee E). To illustrate, Participant A discussed how he conducted all of his own research via the internet and spent hours on forums to find out the minimal details about Boothville-Venice. Interviewee A stated, "They never mentioned anything about Lower Plaquemine's. It was mainly Belle Chase on up that they mentioned, and it was mainly New Orleans." Respondents E expressed his frustration with the lack of coverage, "I think it is ridiculous. That's one of those instances where one of the places that brings in the most revenue, and they could care less about it [Boothville-Venice] in my opinion."

Most media coverage centered on the slowness of the government's response to Katrina ("National Day of Prayer for Katrina Victims Gets Mixed Response Nationwide" 2005), rather than informing citizens of the extent of damage to more rural areas. Participant A shared one lesson he learned following Katrina, "Do not put too much emphasis on the news, because they may not have any information for you." Response being so slow and lacking much media attention except on the lack of aid for those affected, that as a result, a day of mourning was not issued until almost three weeks following the storm. In contrast to 9-11, what many American's considered this Nation's last major disaster prior to Katrina, which held a national day or mourning within days ("National Day of Prayer for Katrina Victims Gets Mixed Response Nationwide" 2005).

Respondent K discusses her frustration with media's lack of coverage of her hometown. "What gets me is when the hurricane hits you heard nothing but New Orleans. New Orleans, New Orleans, New Orleans. New Orleans did not take a direct hit; what hurt New Orleans was the levee busted. We caught all of that down there and you don't hear nothing, they don't tell you nothing, you don't see what we went through down there." As mentioned, her cousin, Respondent A, took it upon himself to research information about his hometown and inform his loved ones of his finding.

> I was doing all the research. Well, right after the storm, even several months after the storm. They never mentioned anything about Lower Plaquemine's. It was mainly Belle Chase on up, that they mentioned, and it was mainly New Orleans. So, the people from lower Plaquemine's or even, upper Plaquemine's, basically Plaquemine's Parish period. It was no news what-so-ever, nothing they didn't record any information. So, there was a month where no one really knew. The only thing you knew was what you heard from someone else. That news is somewhat unreliable from person to person because each person my accidentally add their own sway on what they heard. You never know if it's completely true. So, yeah the news definitely let the people of Plaquemine's Parish down, big time.

The lack of media coverage is not a new experience for residents; as mentioned, they evacuate on yearly bases and residents of Boothville-Venice rarely see post-storm coverage. Though they disagree with where the media focuses, they understand this price for living in a small coastal community. Along with understanding the responsibility involved in living in an area vulnerable to storms, residents know how the recovery process works. Respondent D's family always assured him if the worst case scenario happened they would be taken care of by personal insurance and disaster aid.

> As you got older, you knew there was a chance that a big one would come. And as you got older your parents would let you know that it's a big threat, but if ever something happens, don't worry we'll take care of it, insurance would help you out. They talk about, when they went through Camille, all what the government did to help them, and they all assumed that the same thing would happen in the future. A hurricane comes, your house gets destroyed, and your insurance pays you. All you did was clean up your yard and the government would help you out; I mean they would let you borrow a trailer or a camper or something, until you could buy your own, or they'll sell you one cheaply made one at a cheap price. My grandmother's house went through both Hurricanes Camille and Betsy and is still standing. (Respondent D)

Respondent D marks a noticeable difference in assistance after Katrina compared to the events his parents related about the assistance after other hurricanes. Because he provided a home for his family after Katrina, bills began to rise and the family could only help a bit with finances. The main source of help they provided was through food stamps, providing enough food for the house so that the usual grocery money could cover the rising bills. "The food stamps was more than enough and that was fine, there was food and you can't use that for anything else it was just for food, and so we ate good (laughs while saying this) we just struggled everywhere else."

Most interviewees speak of local systems of help such as churches, community centers, and daycares more than of national agencies. Those local groups, along with locally supported

United Way and The Salvation Army, provided respondents with immediate, necessary provisions of clothes, food, and toiletries.

> We found different places we could go, were given food and cases of water. We could go to some of the places and look for clothes, so yeah there was help in that sense that we could go to. We had the American Red Cross, we had the Salvation Army. We received boxes of MC food. We had a lot of that that was given to us. Rations, you know, they'd set you up with personal need things. (Respondent H)

Respondent H notes the time taken when working with national organizations, but the thankfulness of having spent the time with local and state organizations. "When I had went to Belle Chase to apply for FEMA assistance, we were there six hours in line. And food stamps. I'm thankful we had food stamps for several months after. It was greatly appreciated that we had the food stamps."

Respondent N discussed Red Cross and FEMA's assistance along with that of the neighbors, where they were relocated.

> The Red Cross, they helped out in the state. They did the food stamps, which we'd never used public assistance in our life, so that was an adventure, we didn't even know how to go about doing that. In Monterrey, they knew we were from the storm and the neighbors there opened up a house next to us so that some of the people could move in there so we weren't so many in the same house. Strangers stepped in to help. We took advantage of everything we were eligible for. It helped out. But FEMA, they helped us, I can't complain. My husband got in touch with them instead of me.

Similarly, Respondent B did receive help from citizens of the area to which she temporarily relocated; "The people of Lafayette, they were helpful, wonderful people; it's a nice town all together. They wanted to help us." However, Respondent B recalls the denial of aid from FEMA and Red Cross.

> FEMA didn't help me at all. Like even though I went to them asking for it, they said that because I didn't have much before Katrina, FEMA couldn't help me, and Red Cross didn't help me. The big government companies didn't want to, like Red Cross and FEMA, they just, we went to them and they acted like we were

taking up their time, and they didn't want to bother with just another individual person.

Not all respondents were denied assistance by national organizations. The nation assistance services, FEMA and Red Cross, provided some with help, but only after a period of time wherein a gauntlet of red-tape and Catch 22's of paperwork and protocols had to be navigated. This was frustrating for most and disheartening for those who could not escape the protocols of paperwork. Respondent J explains in dealing with aid her life and her decision to relocate or return was put on hold. "It takes 90 to 120 days to find out if you're approved for more money for your loan. It's only a request, not a promise. So we may not get enough money, and we may have to come down here [Venice]. But I don't know" (Respondent J). Respondent J further explained her dealings:

> I filled out our SBA application at the beginning of November and we didn't hear anything until the end of April and beginning of May. And it wasn't even that they gave us money, they just called to say, "Hey, you were approved for this amount of money." And then we didn't get our first SBA appointment until beginning of May. Then there was a miscommunication with the person he had a meeting with because we were supposed to get our first bit of money. So for some reason it didn't happen. And we finally had to go back and get the first bit of money and then start waiting and wondering if we should spend the money. It's really, really aggravating with the money. It's just a very, very long process with the SBA.

Some residents fortunate enough to receive assistance from the national organizations without much delay; these individuals also found out that money ceased, sometimes too early, if one possessed insurance. Respondent L explains the initial helps she received, initially money and eventually just items. "When Red Cross was giving out a certain amount of money I forgot what it was two, three hundred dollars, something like that any way. Well yes, we got that, I got help from FEMA at first I think it is like two thousand or something like that. That was it. I

can't get any other help from FEMA because I bought a house. The only help we received was

not money wise but my clothing, articles you need in a house."

Respondent F's biggest frustration is the assistance organizations using each other as an

excuse not to provide aid. She knows what she needs to do to argue the decisions, but she cannot

afford a lawyer, and as such must give up the fight.

> The insurances aren't paying off. You paid for them thinking you have insurance
> and there is always a clause where you not covered. SBA won't give you the
> money because you had insurance, FEMA won't give you money until they know
> for a fact the insurance isn't paying you, so everybody is playing on everybody's
> heels and it is taking forever. And I am looking at living here in Bellechase for
> another year or two. (Respondent F)

Respondent F explains her experiences with different organizations and the varying results. F

comments that this conflict with her insurance company has the potential to put her life on hold.

She says, "People are getting on with their lives, I want to get on with mine." However, she

notes a clear difference between organizations and individuals. "The people that I dealt with

one-on-one, they have been great. It's the people you can't see and you can't deal with one on

one that's the problems, and the ones in the office are the ones in control, and that's where all the

hold ups are." Respondents did not consider aid workers to be a problem in the response, but

instead blamed the larger organization. "I mean the people in offices for FEMA, don't get me

wrong their nice as can be, the actual FEMA program isn't not working like it used to. It's just

it's very slow; one end don't know what the other end is doing," comments Respondent F.

Reynolds (2002) discusses status and the higher one's status, the more chances he or she

has to mourn and take advantages of support offered for their loss. Those with more income

available to them were able to refute decisions made against them by assistance organizations;

however, without resources, many accepted the decisions made because they had not choice.

Interviewee F was denied wind damage funds. An insurance representative outlined what she

needed to do to fight the denial, but she lacks funds, and individuals without financial support do

not have the power to fight a large corporation.

> Can't fight it I don't have the money, I don't have the time. I am just tired of
> fighting with them. It's time to move on, but the people that I dealt with one on
> one they have been great. It's the people you can't see and you can't deal with
> one on one that's the problems, and the ones in the office are the ones in control,
> and that's where all the hold ups are. (Interviewee F)

Reynolds (2002) presents an example of bias dictated due to industry through health care;

heath care is typically only available to those who work for companies, so people outside this

world fall through the cracks because of the structure of the system of private and personal

insurance. Residents view health insurance as a rare luxury to inhabitants of Boothville-Venice

unless one worked for an oil company or other such large company. However, community

members regard home-owners insurance as a necessity due to the vulnerability of the area.

Those denied insurance claims for damage are denied on technicalities such as coverage for wind

damage coverage but flood damage. The issue here is that the wind brought the flood waters

over the levy systems, but many could not fight the insurances companies due to lack of funds

and time. That is only one example of how the system in place keeps the underrepresented in a

cycle of repression (Reynolds 2002) highlighted by this disaster, but present outside of the

disaster as well.

Support offered for loss reflects the bias trends in society. Those who could afford

insurance noted being denied aid from national organization, while in some case also being

denied insurance claims. Respondent E's family owned a trawling boat because they are

commercial fisherman, but they found the social structure was constructed to immediately aid

workers belonging to a company faster than independent business owners (Reynold 2002).

Awaiting this aid could prolong some families' ability to earn a living as explained by

Respondent E, "my parents and brother-in-law, it took them a while to get funds from FEMA and from insurance; they had to basically fight Federal Emergency."   Respondent E's family ended up relying on independent contractors to recover their boat, their only means of income, in order to provide both and income and a shelter.

> My parents and brother-in-law, it took them a while to get assistance from FEMA and from insurance. I think they received aid about seven months after the storm, after sending applications in over and over again. If they would've waited, that boat wouldn't've never been in the water, and they wouldn't have been able to go to work and make money anymore. They had hired a professional contractor to get the boat in the water as soon as they could. (Respondent E)

The perception of government inadequacy in response to a disaster which leads to personal motivation to move towards normality is not only confined to this area of study. Oliver-Smith's (1986) study of the earthquake, and resulting landslide, in Yungay echoes these sentiments of government inadequacy and prompts initiative to change in the community affected there as well. It took four days to fully understand the scope of the disaster in Yungay, and feelings of abandonment took shape because once aid began to arrive, much of it was not appropriate. The government stepped in to lend aid and relocated the survivors to four camps with the promise of assistance to rebuild in those areas. This being unacceptable to the people of Yungay because relocation would mean a loss of their way of life, so they rebuilt in a similar area against the wishes of their government. (Oliver-Smith 1986). Though the areas of Yungay and Boothville-Venice are different in culture as well as their respective disasters, but the issues with aid in assisting ones future existed for both groups. Respondents for this thesis spoke of future aid affecting their decision to return. Participant F is still undecided as to whether her and her family will return, but ten months after Katrina she is still fighting her insurance company.

> There is not much left anymore [in Venice], but our main concern is not what's left after the Hurricane for us particularly, but Louisiana in general. With the levees systems not being as strong as they use to be, it worries me that smaller

hurricanes are going to come through now and put us right back in the situation we were just in. And we have recovered before [referring to Hurricane Betsy and Camille] and if it happens again there are a lot of government agencies that I know right now are so stretched thin because of Katrina, and so messed up politic wise. Funding wise that if something big like this happens again this summer it would even be harder to recover from. For a lot of people that have rebuilt houses they haven't been able to get insurance anymore. A lot of insurance companies aren't touching them right now because they have had to pay out so much money. If something happens again not only will they not have their insurance, or funding from the government, they won't have insurance at all anymore. (Interviewee D)

Whether through frustrations of lack of media knowledge or absence of adequate assistance, residents of Boothville-Venice all expressed concern of the situation if another hurricane of this magnitude hit the area. This issue affects many in their decisions in returning to the area.

Reynolds (2002) reflects on the larger more sociological issues involving policies and laws which form our social structure. If an individual is not recognized in the social world, they are viewed as deviant and oppressed in there representation and benefits by policies. Reynolds' (2002) work centers on instances when society denies someone the right to grieve. Society is denying them their loss and experience. He contributes insight into how the social system in large business and organization models society's social norms and laws that marginalize individuals. These laws are advantage to those aid companies more than to the affected resident. Respondent F explains,

It is the recover that has been totally different. The recovery for Betsy and Camille was rapid; help was there almost immediately. Well not to mention Camille cleaned up after itself, so it was very easy to get started again. Katrina just left a total mess and here we are on month, what are we on eleven. No month ten and most people still don't even have their properties cleaned, a place to stay, nothing. And the ones that are there 90% are in FEMA campers, and no means, no finical mean of getting anything better at this point. Right now we are going to be living in a FEMA trailer for another year or so. The insurances aren't paying off like they, you paid for them thinking you have insurance and there is always a clause where you not covered. SBA won't give you the money because you had insurance, FEMA won't give you money until they know for a fact the insurance isn't paying you, so everybody is playing on everybody's heels and it is taking

forever. And I am look at living here in Bellechase for another year to two year.
It's a slow a slow recovery and it is a lot slower than what it was before.

Residents of Boothville-Venice lost faith in their systems through lack of media coverage, slowness and denial of expected aid, and the inability to confirm their importance in Louisiana's atmosphere affirmed. Respondent D comments on the social situation of the area,

> Southern Louisiana needs employees to work jobs, but if you work those jobs you should, the government should have a plan for you in case this happens, we know its going to happen because we're near the Gulf, no where in the Gulf is safe. So, if you want the people to live here, in Louisiana, you have to take up the responsibility and say, "Okay, we want you here, but in case something happens we've got your back. So, I mean its happened before with Camille and Betsy.

Due to these constraints, residents of this area are concerned with returning to the area for fear of dealing with another hurricane that could elicit a similar situation. Loss of Faith in Systems manifests the loss of will to repopulate the area, a very different feeling than many had about their futures pertaining to the area pre-Katrina. In the comparison of pre- and post-Katrina perceptions of Faith in Systems for respondents, the major loss of faith is through the lack of expected responses to actions. This affects the decisions respondents made about their futures in relation to Boothville-Venice, Louisiana.

Chapter 6:

RESULTS

Social Construct and Loss of Future

The dimension of future is the one dimension that is the speculative, both pre- and post-Katrina, and as such, it falls to the Results section of this thesis. The loss of future is shaped by the loss of the previous five dimensions of Community, Work, Family, Identity, and Faith in System; for, a loss of these in the present effect the outcome of the future. Loss of future is also a non-traditional loss as it is the loss of something which one does not yet have; however, the manner in which it is lost corresponds to our definition of bereavement, meaning a loss by force never to be returned. Thus is can be studied in the loss and grieving sense, and most respondents do grieve the loss of the life they planned for themselves.

Many respondents, especially those of older and middle-aged generations, spoke of never leaving their residences in Boothville-Venice. One of the first statements Respondent K relays is, "I always just lived in Venice, and I though I would always be in Venice, I never thought I would be in Denham Springs. I just always thought I would be down there." The notion of growing-up, raising one's family, and watching that family grow in the area prevailed in the interviews of those generations; however, this feeling differs slightly for the younger generations. Talk of inheritance is a common subject in most households with parents passing on businesses, traditions, and property, which was in the family for generations. Those younger generations, knowing their families' land would be passed to them planned to leave and return, and upon doing so, give back to the community to make it better than when they were young. Respondent G expresses his plan: "I could go out and change, and come back and make it a better place." Very few of the younger respondents interviewed spoke of leaving and never

returning. Now, post-Katrina, with many residents' futures being so drastically changed, two choices emerge as the dominant paths: rebuild or relocate. Whether an individual or family chooses to return to this community following Katrina does not discard the loss of future they sought because, regardless of their return or not, they all note things will not be what they were before the storm. At the time each interview took place, there were two respondents who returned, twelve decided not to return, and one is undecided.

Respondent H grew up, married, and raised her son, now 24 years old, in Venice. She hoped and intended to spend her life there, but due to Hurricane Katrina, yearly evacuations, her husband working away two-thirds of the year, and her family not returning, Respondent H chose to relocate. "I just didn't want to go through that again. You're already in a mental turmoil." Respondent H is living in her very first new home and is adjusting to life in the city of Houma.

Respondent A, son of respondent H, describes how some of the family attempts to remain in close proximity to one another. Family members purchased property next door to his mother's new home. Participant H hoped to see her family stay in Venice and grow as the members before her did, but she states,

> My son and my husband both said they would never go back, they could not go back. My mother and father said they would never go back. And the rest of my family was very iffy about whether they would ever go back. They wasn't sure… But I just didn't want to go through that again.

This is a common notion in the decision to not return. Participant H's niece, Respondent K, and her husband came to the difficult conclusion to relocate.

Respondent K, cousin and niece to Respondents A and H respectively, never expected to leave Boothville-Venice. Of returning, she states, "The main reason to be there would be for family and all, and they're not there either so there is no reason to go back. I always thought my son would grow up being down there like I did." Of her situation now, she details her plans and

wants for herself. "Well I would like to go back to school and get my Bachelors in Early Childhood so I can teach; I would like to do that. I'd like to see my son graduate, and see his family."

When Respondent K discusses her life following Hurricane Katrina, she notes it seeming utterly unreal, and as her eyes tear up she examine that even if they did return and rebuild, things would never be the same.

> When we are going that way it is like even though I am living here I feel like I am going home, where I have always know. It's like I am just going back home. And even if you really wanted to go back there, there is nothing down there. There is no grocery store and no gas. I mean you got to go to Bellechase to get all that you need. And the main reason to be there would be for family and their not there either, so there is no reason to go back. You know it's not gonna be the same especially when everybody is scattered all over. That's what was nice about being down there. I mean you, had everybody right there, and we have always been really close with my family and that's one thing that's hard. I always thought my son would grow up being down there like I did. (Interviewee K)

Respondent K and her husband held a clear understanding of their life and future prior to Hurricane Katrina. When the storm destroyed their home, all of their dreams and plans needed to be reexamined and redefined.

All respondents took different accepts of their lives into consideration and adjusted them accordingly. For many, closeness to family was the most important factor. Some considered the lack of resources in Venice and the minimum aid one may receive if another storm destroys the area. Others definitely could not imagine experiencing another catastrophic storm.

Respondent L plans on a future which is significantly different from her past. In the past, every time a hurricane moved the house, they stayed with her family in Westwego while the house was replaced on its blocks and repaired. On a number of occasions, she mentions that it was her husband's decision to return the family to Venice. However, post-Katrina is different for her because this is the first hurricane without her deceased husband.

I decided to buy this house, but it wasn't built yet. I always wanted a yellow house, my husband liked white so we had white siding. But then I said, 'Well I can make up my own mind this time', So I got the yellow house and the yellow color inside which I am going to be so yellowed out pretty soon. My husband wasn't there any more to do it, and I would have had to depend on my children, which they would have eventually helped me, but they have their own stuff to do because everybody lost. It was not just me, it was them too. And I felt like I don't have that many years to fool with that. I didn't want to fool with it. If I get another house then I can move in, and okay I will start all over again.

She notes that it is hard to start over again, so instead of returning, she says, "I decided to take a house and I made a home." Though she moved away from the area and owns a new home she still maintains ownership of the property in Venice. "I do not want to have it bulldozed. I did not want to get rid of it. I am not going to sell it, or give permission to get that done because it is there." L likes her current home and hopes that she can live the rest of her life out in this area without going through relocation again. "I prayed about it, and I felt like this was where I had to live. I hope I can live there for the rest of my life." For Participant L, she accustomed herself to evacuating for storms and rebuilding due to hurricanes damaging her homes. Every time a hurricane moved the house, her husband replaced their home on its blocks and repaired it.

We went through Betsy my husband redid the house and we went through Camille and my husband redid the house, but then he wasn't here to do it this time. So I says, if I get enough insurance money I am going to get another house away from home, away from there. (Interviewee L)

She goes on to explain that if her husband was still alive they probably would return. Due to Katrina she moved away from the area, but stills she mentions missing the people she developed relationships with in her 58-year residency. Respondent L mentions the main reason she does not return is, "I figured I don't want to fool with that [storms and evacuating], I don't have that many years left."

Participant F's decision whether or not to return is based on an already stressed marriage. Issues existed pre-Katrina and surfaced following the hurricane. As of right now, she is looking

at remaining in Bellechase for at least two years. As a result Participant F has two plans. The plan to return hinges on the property getting cleaned up and the family staying together, but the only benefits she notes are, her and her husband will be closer to work and the children will have a yard to play in. She notes the benefits of vicinity to major shopping centers, fast food restaurants, and entertainment for the children influence the decision to stay in Bellechase. "The children are happier up here." If she chooses to stay there, she states, "As soon as I have the money, I'll buy us a house or a trailer something, something more permanent, and just settle here. I mean all my family is up here.

> The only thing I hope and dream for is to raise these kids and do the best that I can with them. I don't hope and dream on having a house or… my own planned future; a long time ago I gave up on that. I learned that this is what I have, I deal with it now, this opportunity comes I take it. If it don't come, it don't. I just… I am trying to build a future by getting my education and I am going to be teacher, that's the only dream I am going to fulfill there other than I am going to raise my kids to be there best and that's it. I am not a person that wants extravagance. I am not a person that needs fancy stuff or anything. This FEMA trailer this is fine. It this is home this is good; I can raise kids in it. (Interviewee F)

D and Dd, an engaged couple with plans on marriage in the near future, both have ambitions of graduating from college soon. Both wanted to further their educations to provide for their family the things they did not get as children. Dd wants to be "…the mom that goes on field trips and stays at home. After school, I can be there for them when they're sick and need help."

Participant D and Dd, at the time of Katrina, were in Baton Rouge, Louisiana for school, but before the storm, D spent a great deal of time in Boothville-Venice with his family. D chose not to return citing outside reasons and hurricanes. For Respondent D's parents, the discussion to return is still undecided. He points out, "It's not going to go back to the way it was before the hurricane." Interviewee D mentions that he wants to relocate further west to an area not as

affected by Hurricane and positioned so that evacuation routes do not take him through New Orleans. He wants to be near family though, so the difference will be split to fulfill both goals. He does not want to return to Boothville-Venice as a permanent residency but will maintain their property in the area.

Respondent N had no doubts about returning to Boothville-Venice. "I knew I was coming home. We've lived here all our lives. A lot of people who said, 'I'm not going home' moved down before I did. It's just the way we live." Respondent N's daughter, Respondent J, will do what's best for her son, so that "[I will] just be able to have a stable environment for him [her son] to have a home, be able to cook dinner at night, do laundry, the family stuff. Just to have that settled makes me very happy. That's my dream, something as simple as that."

Respondent E speaks of his future away from Boothville-Venice because he "…lost everything. I don't need to go back there no more. Everything I have is here in Baton Rouge now. My hope is to finish school. My dream is to get a house."

Participant M grew up hearing stories of devastating storms, and she knew, "I could not go through this again. My family on the other hand never questioned not returning, though I tried to persuade them otherwise; in fact, they were one of the first families to start the rebuilding process in Boothville." She chose not to return and help rebuild the house that she originally help build.

Participant M's sister, Participant B, chose not to return to Boothville-Venice as well. Instead, Participant B resettled in Thibodeaux, Louisiana, and she sees herself being away from Boothville.

> I didn't see my future, I didn't see anything. I couldn't see anything. But now I see myself reaching more goals, in school doing what I want to do, and more of a life for myself. Like I see myself traveling like I want to do; I want to travel and study more. Just going to the places I want to go. And building the home I want,

and maybe just maybe and some day getting married and having kids like I dreamed I would.

All respondents made decisions in regards to their future of whether to return or relocate, but in one way or another, all are rebuilding their lives. Oliver-Smith (1986) conducted field research in Peru, and stories to emerge depict how these individuals took control of their future after the area was devastated due to a earthquake May 31, 1970. The earthquake resulted in a catastrophic landslide that left about 70,000 dead, and forced change upon the people of Peru. The author then examines the meaning of change and how it applies to cultures. The struggle to maintain their culture was an element the survivors of Yungay fought for because they lost material, political, and social ties that day. Disaster united the survivors in their grief; similarly, Erikson (1995) claims that a new community is created from a disaster. A common bond is created when individuals experience trauma due to a devastating event, and they are bonded by that experience.

Oliver-Smith (1986) claims the communities sense of place to Yungay was extremely strong and held in many respects their sense of identity, and community members would not allow their capital – Yungay - to be relocated. The government did not encourage the idea of rebuilding because many felt it was a waste of money. The earthquake and landslide already affected the people and culture; they would not consider changing the capital because of the need to hold on to their cultural traditions along with the potential catastrophic loss of the community ties and cultural heritage. Instead of following the government's wishes, they settled their new capital at Pashulpampa which served their needs, allowing them political control over their communities, and arguable served as a means of grief work. The communities banded together to avoid the relocation and government takeover, and ten years after the disaster, they still hold it close to them and it became a part of the culture.

Like Hurricanes Betsy and Camille, which are storms each respondent discussed, Hurricane Katrina will become a part of the culture of the affected families. Other residents of Boothville-Venice took control of their futures in returning to their home and rebuilding. Interviewee N notes that she sees her family's future in this area. She is holding out hope that the rest of the community members will return. However, similar to other respondents who chose to relocate, she cannot go through another devastating storm.

> A lot of people waiting, and this storm season, we'll see if we make it through. Everybody's close to home. Some of 'em are planning to come back; everybody'll be back it's a matter of time. [If] it happened again this year and it might not happen again for another forty years. [We will] up and leave. [But] It takes to long, the process to get back home. You'd think that with all the things you can do with the modern world, you can bring a community back. Still you see they're working on getting things done. So I wouldn't be able to come back. (Interviewee N)

What the future holds for community members from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana is still pending for many residents. Out of the countless lives affected by Hurricane Katrina, these respondents are a few who shared their experiences, hopes, and dreams. One aspect shaping the future of these community members and their families' lives to come is their stories of Katrina, such as Hurricane Betsy and Camille were passed to me and others. Many participants lost the future they held, and they struggled to decide between a future away from home or a return to the area they loved so much, but all addressed the fact that whether they returned home was irrelevant to the fact that their lives were not going to go back to the way they were pre-Katrina.

Interpretation of Findings

The guiding research question for this thesis is: What is the understanding of loss and grief community members from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana experienced due to Hurricane Katrina? Wolcott (1994) addresses interpretation as the process of answering the questions arising from the research. He suggests that researchers push the boundaries of knowledge and

explore where this information could lead. Using the residents' experiences from Hurricane Katrina, along with theories of loss and grief, emerging in respondent's transcripts, I developed residents' socially constructed dimensions of loss. Furthermore, how those dimensions create community members' overall experience of loss. Each community will experience loss as a whole, but the individual losses differ for each person. The community of Boothville-Venice was displaced due to the storm but some respondents grieved more for the loss of employment in the community than the loss of community bonds, whereas for others the opposite was true.

In the task of answering the sub-questions which guide this thesis, the pieces manifested to answer the main guiding question. Taking into account all the information gathered and compared to the existing research, I provide information to present my findings. The social construction of loss of residents of Boothville-Venice, Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina develops through the overall understanding of loss broken down into the six most prevalent dimensions of loss dictated in the Methods section. The six dimensions of loss (Community, Work, Family, Identity, Faith in System, and Future) affect the past, present, and future realities these individuals possess by providing 'roles,' "face," and "lines" for these individuals, as discussed earlier. This provides the comparison portion for the question: How does the understanding of loss and grief community members affected by Hurricane Katrina relate or add to the existing literature on loss and grief? After cross-referencing with the available literature on loss and grief, both supports and adds to the pool of knowledge. This thesis provides look at the grief of a community whose social supports been mostly removed and who must adapt to a new surrounding whilst working through their loss and grief.

One's personal interpretation of loss depends on the type of community an individual inhabits. Loss is multifaceted and a part of reality. Symbolic interactionism helps to understand

the reality in which we exist. This theory assists in breaking down the social construction of the reality we engage in, which many researchers of symbolic interactionism note is culturally dependent (Goffman [1955] 1999; Blumer 2003). Therefore symbolic interactionism helps us understand loss, and how one experiences it is also culturally dependent (DeSpelder and Strickland 1999). Community members from Boothville-Venice experienced a great deal of loss individually and as a collective. Due to the significance of the losses, as many lost everything, residents also experienced a loss of reality. The last sense of normalcy residents engaged in was evacuating for Hurricane Katrina, consequently their reality following Katrina required reconstruction.

Growing up in a coastal community, I noticed the differences other towns provide. I have lived in areas outside Boothville-Venice, and, similar to most respondents of this thesis, I noted the difference in the amount of chain business, traffic, and the "everyone knows everyone" factor. Coastal community members are not only tight-knit socially and for security purposes, they are also economically dependent on one another. Pre-Katrina, the majority of resident filled a niche in the area. Some worked in shops or hardware stores, the local school, off the land, and all survived because of one another. Without others in the community providing services and goods in their respective 'roles', any community would wither, but Boothville-Venice is different in that a more reliant interplay was existent between community members due to the a deeper, more communal level of connection. Understanding those elements of life, social roles, and the derived knowledge of respondents' loss and grief enabled me to better comprehend their social constructions of loss.

In using symbolic interactionism, I account for the individual in the social context, but the primary focus is on the community experience as a whole. In relation to Shami's (1993)

work, a community using natural resources to supply an income experiences loss of work, loss of community, and loss of those natural resources in the event of a disaster. The recovery process for such a community is difficult because they are the lowest totem of the resource pole, and there exist no lower caste of employment to bring income into the community. As such, if tools to ply the trade are lost, the community must disperse to other areas. One example of the understanding of loss as culturally dependent and in the hierarchy of importance placed by the "team" from which one comes is seen with the loss of a boat. Growing up a commercial fisherman, I understand the significance in the loss of a boat, a non-traditional loss in the loss and grieving sense. It is a means of providing an income, putting food on the table, and sheltering your family. Others from a dissimilar community may see it only as the loss of a recreational vehicle, but those from a similar coastal-lying community will understand the significance of this loss.

For a long time hurricanes affected this area and every resident interviewed mentioned past hurricanes. The social construction of their world involved accepting the possibility of severe storms. Residents, including myself, compared the experience of Katrina to that of Camille and Betsy, either through first- or second-hand accounts. This knowledge shapes our understanding of storms and impacted our responses to the storm. I observed the recovery process is the main difference many respondents discussed between past hurricanes and Katrina. The recovery process for Katrina is considered a state and federal debacle by many respondents. Respondent D discussed how he was raised with the reassurance that, if a storm came through, insurance and aid would help the recovery especially for those who worked out of the area. Many were disappointed when the expected aid failed to be provided during the recovery process. With many viewing the recovery as poor, this will shape people's reactions to future

storms. For many Louisiana residents affected by Katrina, especially those along the Coast, future decisions of rebuilding and moving to areas such as Boothville-Venice are in doubt.

Hurricane Katrina affected the community of Boothville-Venice, and even though the future for the members is still being determined, acts taken toward a new future emerged. All discussed their lives not returning to the way they were pre-Katrina; even if some chose to return all mentioned it would not go back to "the way it was." However, in this experience the devastated were united in the common bond of a disaster. Groups were untied in the overall experiences but specifically smaller groups were untied because of their common understanding and existence along similar "lines," for example, the loss of one's boat is a common uniting element for those living along the coast. A larger industrial community impacted by Katrina may not embrace the loss of a boat as significant as do many coastal lying communities. The common understanding creates a bond in those coastal communities which is another aspect of uniting and collective understanding. Oliver-Smith (1986) discussed how survivors of Yungay were united due to the disaster and being a survivor. This corresponds with Erikson's (1995) claim that a new community is created from a disaster. A common bond is created when individuals experience trauma due to a devastating event, and they are bonded together by that experience. In contrast, though meaning and collective understanding emerges with the displaced and relocated the individuals and smaller groups in the society affected may struggle to keep community bonds. Marris (1975) addresses a concern in relocation of community members across different areas. He states that when the relocation in Boston took place group ties began to unravel and even 'roles' and relationships in families began to break down due to the lack of the previously existing social support systems. Residents of Boothville-Venice and other coastal lying areas are united in their grief, but what will happen to the bonds these people have with

other members? As Respondent K notes, she sees little of her extend family, and she still does not know what happened to some friends and colleagues.

Residents' interviews focused on their loss in six areas which were Community, Work, Family, Identity, Faith in the Systems, and Future. Through these dimensions, this thesis provides an understanding of the small coastal community, Boothville-Venice. However, reading across the previously mentioned six dimensions, two other, lesser articulated, yet socially constructed themes interweaved through the transcripts used for this thesis. The themes of gender and class could provide two more areas of study. A separate gender and class analysis would be a rich contribution to this study, or other studies, by providing a socially examined experience of loss and grief through the social focus of gender and class in relation to Hurricane Katrina. A generational analysis may provide further depth into the understanding of life pre- and post-Katrina, and a comparison across generations with the experiences due to Katrina may provide further depth into the significances of losses. Finally, an examination of the "stranger" (Simmel [1908] 1999) or displaced in the host community (Shami 1993) would provide additional insight to the residences experiences in a new community and perceptions into the adapting into another social groups; furthermore, allowing for a bridge into a cross cultural analysis.

This thesis involving devastated coastal community members discusses a subject matter that can add to the pool of knowledge from which recovery agencies draw their research material. Providing a better understanding of these communities and their needs enables future understanding of social norms surrounding grief and loss. Much of the traditional research in loss and grief focuses on individual and often isolated losses such as the loss of a family member, a pet, a job, a home, and the like. However, this thesis address a situation where

individuals and a community as a whole lost everything which encompasses the singular losses addressed, and additionally may prove to be a stepping stone to developing a collective understanding into a communities meaning of loss. This data may be transformative to other small close-knit, coastal communities.

Chapter 7:

CONCLUSION

The understanding of loss and grief of dislocated communities from Boothville-Venice, Louisiana experienced due to Hurricane Katrina aids understandings in several areas of sociology. It adds to the manner in which people attach meaning to objects, events, and their overall world. It furthers the knowledge on communities who chose to live in an area affected by hurricanes and factors affecting the decision to return home after a devastating storm. This thesis also highlights community member's perception of societal response to the displaced and relocated. It improves the understanding and adds to knowledgebase of loss and grief. Much of loss and grief research is generalized into a single category such as job loss, pet loss, property loss, or a death. This text concentrates on residents from a specific geographic area and how they experienced a number of losses at once, and it is transformative to other small coastal communities.

The nature of loss is culturally dependent. One experiences grief due to losses that are socially constructed as significant in the "team" in which they exist. On the other hand, experiences can deviate from the socially regulated guidelines and this is where non-traditional or unrecognized loss becomes an issue in a social groups. When a society understands and accepts non-traditional losses they become legitimate and societal change has occurred. A means of examining the nature of loss of a community is through its social formation and the hierarchy of importance placed. Each culture has it own rules and regulations governing communities and individuals, consequently certain losses are viewed as more significant than others. With an understanding of the patterns of losses in its cultural context one can distinguish the meaning of loss of a given group. The different meanings each social group or culture

maintains can be compared cross culturally, and an analysis of the meaning and nature of loss of a given social group can be studied.

The analysis of this thesis is also significant for other scholars because it addresses issues of trust stemming from faith in 'the system.' The feelings and perceptions community members hold will result in creating more social issues, thus potentially impacting future decisions and policies involving disaster affected areas. It is my hope that the topics discussed in this thesis will inspire others to examine certain aspects more closely in order to eventually arrive at a solution to the issues stemming from disasters such as Hurricane Katrina.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Tell me about where you grew up?
(Probe)

Describe what it was like being an adult in Boothville-Venice?
(Job and Family)

Talk to me about the community response to the mandatory evacuation for Hurricane Katrina?
(How is evacuation part of your world?)

Tell me about the days immediately following Hurricane Katrina?
(Actions)

Talk to me about the help you received?
(Family, Friends, Strangers, and "The System")

Talk to me about the effects of Hurricane Katrina on your family?

Tell me about how you dealt with Hurricane Katrina?

Talk to me about why you chose or did not choose to return to Boothville-Venice?

Tell me about how your life changed since Katrina?
        Talk about the most difficult decision you made.

        Talk to me about the hardest part of life after Katrina.

        Tell me about your hopes and dreams.

"If your grandchildren were here what would you want to tell them?" *Dr. Pam Jenkins*

Vita

Nicole Buras was born in Boothville-Venice, Louisiana, "at the end or the world." As a child and young woman she was a commercial shrimper. In 2002, Nicole received her Associate Degree from Nunez Community College and in 2004 she earned her Bachelor Degree from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.